



B

B

C



SHOEBOX ZOO

CBBC Scotland, Blueprint Entertainment
and Alberta Filmworks

Present



Starring

Jason Connery
Peter Mullan
David McKay
Anthony Donaldson

Introducing

Vivien Endicott Douglas as Marnie

And The Voices Of

Simon Callow, Alan Cumming
Rik Mayall, Siobhan Redmond
& Bill Paterson as The Storyteller

Series Created By

CBBC Scotland, Brian Ward, Claire Mundell and Justin Molotnikov

Written By

Brian Ward

Series Director

Justin Molotnikov

Executive Producer and Showrunner for BBC Scotland

Claire Mundell

Executive Producers for Blueprint Entertainment

Noreen Halpern and John Morayniss

Executive Producer for Alberta Filmworks

Tom Cox

Animation By

Calibre Digital Pictures

bbc.co.uk/cbbc/shoeboxzoo

BBC Worldwide

BBC Scotland


blueprint
entertainment


CBCtelevision

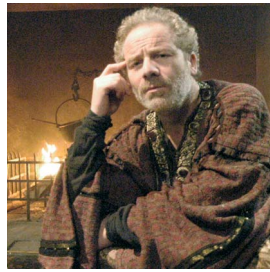

ALBERTA FILMWORKS



A WARNING TO THE OVER ADVENTUROUS...
This weighty tome contains deep and powerful magic.
It should on no account be read in anything but the strictest
chronological order. I pray indulgence for any numerical inconsistencies.
yours, in haste,

The Great Wizard Michael Scot
11-11-2002 (11pm)

THE MAGIC THAT IS SHOEBOX ZOO



Take a dash of Toy Story, a pinch of the magic and mystery of the Lord of the Rings, and mix with the wonder of The Lion, the Witch and Wardrobe and you are some way to understanding the ingredients which make up the new family drama Shoebox Zoo.

The CBBC Scotland, Blueprint Entertainment and Alberta Filmworks co-production hits British television screens this autumn. The 13-part series, filmed in Scotland, boasts big name actors such as Peter Mullan, Jason Connery and Alan Cumming, and introduces talented young Canadian actress Vivien Endicott-Douglas in the lead role of Marnie McBride.

Fusing state-of-the-art CGI (computer generated imagery) animation with classic family drama, the look and feel of the series is quite unlike any other series seen on British television.

Viewers will fall under the spell of young Marnie McBride and the tiny carved animals of the Shoebox Zoo as they set off on an epic adventure to discover the lost Book of Forbidden Knowledge.

The story begins when young Marnie McBride is uprooted from her home in Denver, Colorado, and relocated to the cobbled streets of Edinburgh with her father (Jason Connery), while struggling to cope with the recent death of her mother.

But it's on her 11th birthday that her life takes a dramatic turn of events and she is led into an old junk shop and handed a dusty, dog-eared shoebox. Within the shoebox lie the four beautifully carved animals who spring to life at her command.

The disguised owner of the shop who presents Marnie with this birthday gift is The Great Michael Scot, a Wizard who lived in the Borders of Scotland nearly 11 centuries ago. His power is on the wane and he's desperate to find a successor, The Chosen One.

From that point on Marnie and her new found friends - Ailsa the sly adder (Siobhan Redmond), Bruno the kind hearted bear (Alan Cumming), Edwin the pompous eagle (Rik Mayall) and wily Wolfgang the wolf (Simon Callow) - embark on an adventure in search of the Book of Forbidden Knowledge, lost over a thousand years ago in the Scottish Borders.

Viewers will be taken on a roller coaster ride full of adventure, magic and mystery, from the historic streets of Edinburgh, through the lush countryside of the Scottish Borders and over to North America where forgotten magic from Scotland's past collides with a modern continent and the spiritual traditions of the Lakota tribe of Native Americans.

A big challenge to ask of young Marnie McBride, but even if she accepts the mammoth task ahead of her, she still may not be The Chosen One who can complete the quest and return the long lost book.



**CLAIRE MUNDSELL,
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."



JASON CONNERY PLAYS ROSS MCBRIDE (DAD)

There's a first time for everything and for Jason Connery, star of the popular 1980s television series, Robin of Sherwood, and the stage production of The Blue Room in 2002, it's playing a dad in Shoebox Zoo.

The six foot tall son of James Bond legend Sir Sean Connery laughs when he says: "Now I've reached 41, I'm finally playing dads – but it's cool. I don't mind."

As Marnie's father, Jason brings more than 20 years acting experience in more than 20 films to the role of the ex-pat academic and newly-widowed Ross McBride.

One thing he did flinch at though was his character's bad dress sense. "My street cred is totally out of the window," exclaims the designer label-loving actor, who in real life is dad to seven-year-old son Dashiell. "Have you seen how I dress in this? Although, you never know, there might be a cult following for people dressed in outdoor tops and checked shirts."

Jason, 41, was delighted to be back on home territory for the filming of the first series of Shoebox Zoo. Most of the action was shot in a warehouse in Leith, not far from where his dad grew up.

Although Jason was born in London, he spent a great deal of time in Scotland. He attended Prince Charles' old school, Gordonstoun, in the north of Scotland for four years and, a few years ago, he bought a house in Melrose, in the Scottish Borders, so the Scottish accent he shows off in Shoebox Zoo was effortless.

"I always felt an affinity with Scotland but I thought I would end up further north than the Borders. But I really love it there, there's something about that beautiful undulating countryside which is unique in the world."

Jason currently divides his time between his home in the Borders and Los Angeles, where son Dashiell, named after a character in the Maltese Falcon, lives with his mother, Jason's ex-wife, actress Mia Sara. The couple share custody of their son and Jason is clearly a devoted father.



"I'm sure he'll love the story of Shoebox Zoo which is one of the reasons I wanted to do it. It has such a magical quality."

Jason is also full of praise for his young co-star, Vivien Endicott-Douglas, whom he describes as 'amazing'.

"I have acted with a lot of kids before in Robin of Sherwood, but she is incredible, very natural." He continues: "She has been filming every day and a lot of it has been the digital animation stuff, which in effect is acting with nothing; just the voices of Rik Mayall, Alan Cumming, Simon Callow and Siobhan Redmond. You have good voices to work with but it is bizarre looking at nothing."

Jason describes his character Ross as being a normal guy who is thrown into a difficult situation following the death of his young wife.

"Ross is originally from Edinburgh but went to live in Denver for 13 years. He is an academic, a Special Collections Curator, and one of the reasons he is drawn to the second hand shop in Edinburgh, where Marnie finds the Shoebox Zoo, is his need to find a first edition."

Although Jason admits that the animation side of Shoebox Zoo is fascinating, his character is not party to it and stays very much in the real world.

Jason explains: "When Marnie starts to act strangely, Ross thinks his daughter is going through a nervous breakdown because her mother has just died."

"But hopefully throughout Shoebox Zoo you'll witness the growth of the relationship between father and daughter. I am not involved in this whole other magical world, the animals keep running past me, and I don't have a clue."



PETER MULLAN PLAYS THE GREAT WIZARD MICHAEL SCOT



Peter Mullan plays The Great Scottish Wizard Michael Scot and according to the award-winning actor and director, he has the easiest job of all the actors in the series.

“I just come in every so often, wave a wand, zap people and proclaim doom and gloom unless Marnie finds this damn book!”

Mullan, 44, who co-starred with Kevin Spacey in the 2002 film *Ordinary Decent Criminal*, is one of Scotland’s most prolific actors and directors.

He has written and directed two award-winning films, *Orphans*, and *The Magdalene Sisters*, and, in 1998, won the best leading actor gong at the Cannes Film Festival for *My Name Is Joe*.

With an extensive career in both acting and directing, Peter can’t help but notice the potential he sees in young Vivien who plays Marnie McBride.

“It’s Vivien who is holding the whole project together. She reminds me of Ewan MacGregor in the film *Young Adam* on which we both worked. He was in almost every scene and had to really work to keep his stamina up. It’s incredible a 13-year-old can manage to do the same thing.” Peter continues: “She’s a stunning young actress, a young Jodie Foster.”

According to Peter, playing Michael Scot has been a lot more fun than directing his own work, which, he claims is a ‘24/7 headache’. “This has been great fun because I travel through from Glasgow on the train, turn up for work and let someone else worry. If the production falls behind it’s not my problem, if it rains then I get the afternoon off and they have a nervous breakdown!”

Peter’s character, Michael Scot, is based on a real-life scholar, scientist, astrologer and alchemist who lived in the Scottish Borders from around 1175 to 1230 and was known as the Wizard of the North.

In the story, we meet him disguised as the proprietor of a dusty old antiquarian bookshop into which Marnie McBride and her dad stumble at 11am on the day of her 11th birthday.

It is 11 centuries on from Scot’s time as an Alchemist in his prime, and, with his great powers on the wane, he is desperate to find his successor and recover his Lost Book of Forbidden Knowledge.

The story of *Shoebbox Zoo* appealed to Peter, he says, because there is no clear division between hero and villain. “From an adult and a kid’s point of view, the villains have their good points and the goodies are flawed,” he says. “This makes it interesting dramatically; I think it is important to show kids the shades of grey between what constitutes good and evil.”

Father-of-three Peter admits he is looking forward to appearing in something his children can appreciate.

“My youngest Katrin is just two but my eldest Mairi will be 14 when it comes out and Paddy, my son will be seven. The fact their dad is in it might curtail their enjoyment and shatter the illusion though, because they know their old man ain’t no wizard... that’s for sure.”

VIVIEN ENDICOTT DOUGLAS IS MARNIE MCBRIDE



According to everyone who worked on Shoebbox Zoo, the young Canadian actress, Vivien Endicott-Douglas, is a star in the making.

Her co-star, the actor and director Peter Mullan, says she reminds him of 'a young Jodie Foster.' With a recommendation like that, it's obvious this 13-year-old from Toronto is going places.

As the pivotal figure in Shoebbox Zoo, linking the real world with a magical one inhabited by wizards, illusionists and carved wooden animals who walk and talk, Vivien bears a big responsibility on her young shoulders.

Shoebbox Zoo is Vivien's first job in television. Until now, her only professional acting jobs have been small parts in short films and some radio work in Canada. As Vivien explains, her love of acting goes back a long way.

"When I was little I always loved to watch The Sound of Music," she says. "I would always make my mum act everybody else while I was Maria and sing all the songs. All my dolls would be the kids and we would just play it over and over again."

When viewers first meet Marnie, it is the day of her 11th birthday, her mother has recently died and Marnie has yet to shed a tear. She has been uprooted from her home in Denver, Colorado, and finds it tough to settle into her new Scottish surroundings. A fish out of water, she has no idea what is in store for her until the animals come to life and join her on the quest for the Lost Book of Forbidden Knowledge, which will change her life forever.

"When I act the role of Marnie," smiles Vivien, "I just imagine these little creatures in front of me and it seems to work OK. The voices are great. They are a huge part of how I am able to imagine them being real living breathing creatures. They really help bring the characters to life."

Vivien says she has learned a lot from her fellow actors although she was a little nervous about the prospect: "At first I was a bit intimidated, but once I met them I realised how down-to-earth they are."

Both her younger siblings, she says, are enthralled by the story of Shoebbox Zoo, although her little brother, Gareth, is 'terrified' of Professor Toledo.

"Whenever he sees Tony, who plays Toledo, he cowers behind me," she explains. "We have to explain to him that Tony isn't really like that but it gives you an idea of how good Tony is at his job of being a baddie!"

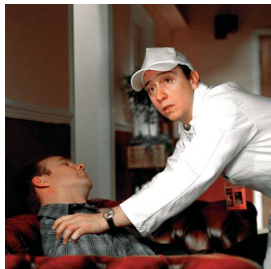
"I think kids will absolutely love Shoebbox Zoo because it has magic and real life mixed in together. They will be able to identify with characters like Marnie and her friends because they're totally believable. The magical world is so enthralling, they won't want to leave it."

Although Vivien admits filming Shoebbox Zoo has been hard work, she still can't believe she landed such a great part.

"When I first read it, a chill went through my body. The whole story sounded so exciting. Working on it has been like a dream. When I've been feeling tired out by all the long days on set, I tell myself this is a once-in-a-lifetime thing. I can't believe how lucky I am to be involved in it."



DAVID MCKAY IS MCTAGGART



Sitting in his trailer on the Shoebox Zoo set in Leith, clad in medieval garb of brown plaid and warm woolly tights, David McKay smiles wryly and says: “This role is great for me.”

Used to being cast as ‘a wee Glasgow ned’ the role of jack-of-all-trades servant McTaggart to both Michael Scot and Professor Toledo is a complete departure for the Glasgow-born actor, writer and director. According to David, his part in Shoebox Zoo gives him a scope to play against type.

“McTaggart is serving two masters; Michael Scot and Professor Toledo for a crime he didn’t commit. Back in the mists of time, he took the book somewhere for safe-keeping so that it wouldn’t corrupt Michael or his pupils.

“Michael Scot believes that McTaggart was involved in the theft and jailed him for 11 years in his dungeon. Until the book is found, he has to walk the earth and be a servant to Toledo and Michael.”

But David explains that the character McTaggart is not a simple, one-dimensional figure, but turns up throughout the series in many different guises.

He laughs, “McTaggart is a great role to play because he is so many different characters, a chauffeur, a janitor, a library cleaner and even a harlequin. He appears in different roles in order to protect Marnie from harm, especially from the tyranny of Toledo.”

Probably best remembered for his role as put-upon drug addict Liam in the Ken Loach film, My Name is Joe, in which he co-starred with his friend and fellow Shoebox Zoo actor, Peter Mullan, it’s the first time the actor has been in a children’s drama.

However, David co-directed six episodes of award-winning Granada sitcom, My Parents Are Aliens, with Shoebox Zoo director Justin Molotnikov.

“That was great crack,” he says. “But at the tail end of 2002, I realised that I had been directing almost constantly for five years and I made it my New Year Resolution for 2003 to get back into acting.”

Since making that resolution, the born-again actor has never been busier. He appeared in the critically acclaimed theatre production Shining Souls at Glasgow’s Tron theatre last summer before working on Ken Loach’s latest film, Ae Fond Kiss.

Happy to be working again with his old mate, Peter Mullan, David is looking forward to seeing how Peter’s children and his own nieces and nephews react.

“I think the story is great. It has warlocks and wizards, castles, cobblestones and trickery, very much an olde worlde Scotland and I think kids and families are going to go wild for it.

“And to top it all, it has a brilliant lead to identify with in wee Vivien. What more could you ask?”

ANTHONY DONALDSON IS PROFESSOR TOLEDO



As master illusionist Professor Toledo, Anthony Donaldson is evil personified.

“Yes, it’s true, I’m not a nice character,” admits the actor, who lives just up the road from the set of Shoebox Zoo, in Leith Walk. When the annals of TV Baddie history are written, Professor Toledo will no doubt be a good contender for top spot.

Toledo, who always dresses in white, is a truly dangerous adversary. “I play a classic baddie,” Anthony explains. “The kids who have come on set to work days here and there have compared me to Simon Cowell from Pop Idol.”

But there are reasons behind Professor Toledo’s evil streak.

“The Wizard Michael Scot created me and was ashamed because I didn’t turn out the way he planned. Toledo is able to do anything he wants. He has magic powers and a complete disregard for human life. He treats people like little insects to be played with so that he can achieve his goal.”

A graduate of the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama back in 1994, Edinburgh-born Anthony worked in theatre for several years before landing parts in Scottish Television’s Taggart and Inspector Rebus as well as the BBC Scotland soap River City.

In his scenes with Shoebox Zoo animal, Wolfgang, voiced by Simon Callow, Anthony has had to learn how to act with nothing, which he admits has been an “odd experience”.



“It’s a bit weird staring into space and keeping up your concentration. You have a marker and then it goes and you’re just left with the voice to act with. But the relationship between Toledo and Wolfgang is very interesting. Toledo knows exactly what makes him tick.”

However, Anthony is a bit concerned with always landing parts which involve him playing a dark character.

“I don’t know why I keep getting cast as the baddie. I played a drug dealer called Mental Minto in Inspector Rebus and in River City I popped up again as a drug dealer. Maybe I have a bad boy look.

“But this is a dream job for me.”



SIOBHAN REDMOND IS AILSA THE ADDER



Acclaimed Scottish actress Siobhan Redmond is the s-s-silken voice behind Ailsa the Adder, the only female inhabitant of the Shoebox Zoo.

“I jumped at the chance to do it,” laughs the Glasgow born star of *Holby City* and *Between the Lines*. “Not only is it a fantastic story, it gave me the chance to play my animal alter ego.

“Ailsa is a tremendous character and I’ve always wanted to play the voice of an animated animal. I get to do a lot of hissing – snakes make so many great noises!”

Siobhan spent three days in London in June 2003 recording the voice of Ailsa alongside Simon Callow, Rik Mayall and her old pal Alan Cumming, with whom she starred in the cult BBC sitcom about air stewards, *The High Life*, back in the 1980s.

“It was a fascinating experience,” she says. “Your voice is being recorded but they also film what you look like when you are saying your lines, your facial expressions, how you move and so on.

“The four of us really only worked together on one day because Alan had so many commitments, it was great to see him again.”



Siobhan, 44, has played a wide range of characters on stage, television and film, during her distinguished career. Just last year, she starred as Edinburgh icon, Miss Jean Brodie, in a critically acclaimed production of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* at Edinburgh’s Royal Lyceum Theatre.

Her latest project is a sitcom for BBC called *The Smoking Room with Man* about the House actress Paula Wilcox and Gosford Park star Jeremy Swift.

Siobhan admits she took an instant shine to the character of Ailsa and couldn’t believe how much she’d enjoyed doing the voice-over recording session.

“We all had great fun doing the recording. Simon, who plays Wolfgang, turned out to be a great howler and after one particularly brilliant howl, we all stopped to give him a round of applause.

“But I really like Ailsa,” she says. “She doesn’t trust anyone and she takes the temperature of every situation very astutely. She’s smart and I like to play smart.

“I think CGI is a great idea because it can make you better-looking each time. Ailsa is tremendous looking!”



RIK MAYALL IS EDWIN THE EAGLE



Actor and comedian Rik Mayall has one major thing in common with his Shoebox Zoo character Edwin the Eagle.

“There’s no doubt about it,” admits the star of comedy classics such as *The Young Ones* and *Blackadder*, “we are both hopeless at the 21st century. He is totally bamboozled by a computer and so am I.”

Rik (46) puts his technology aversion down to the quad bike accident, which almost killed him back in 1988.

He suffered a severe head injury and lapsed into a coma for four days following the accident, which happened at his farm in Devon.

“After recovering,” he continues, “it seemed everyone I knew had mobile phones and computers and I didn’t know how to work them. I still don’t. I have a complete aversion to technology and that’s exactly the same as Edwin so I know what makes him tick.

“I’ve thrown three mobile phones into the Thames in the past because I couldn’t work them. I’ve never been on the internet in my life. My wife Barbara gave me a computer but I haven’t a clue how to work it.”

Rik admits that his technological skills are so poor that he even had to accept help from his daughter in order to watch the first two episodes of *Shoebox Zoo*.

“When the tapes arrived in the post, my youngest child, Bonnie, who is nine, found me trying to put it into the video machine. ‘I’ll show you how, daddy,’ she said, and led me into her room where she put it in her machine.



“It was lucky she saw it as she was able to give me an insight into how children will react to the series, and she loved it, especially the carved animals and she started crying when the little girl, Marnie, told her dad how much she missed her dead mother.”

Rik’s character, Edwin, is the self-appointed leader of the animated animal gang who have lain locked within the *Shoebox Zoo* for 1100 years.

In a veiled reference to Eddie “The Eagle” Edwards, ski jumper and hero of the Calgary Winter Olympics in 1988, Rik’s character cannot fly.

Despite his lack of skill in the air, an obvious failing in a bird of prey, Edwin is pompous, blustering and incapable of admitting he is ever wrong.

“It’s true,” laughs Rik, “He’s vain, self-obsessed, hypocritical and cowardly. He’s also so very English. He thinks he’s much better than the others, whom he considers a bunch of barbarians.”

Rik is no stranger to the world of animated film narration. In the past he has played Toad in *Wind in the Willows* and *The Willows in Winter* (for which he won an Emmy). He also worked on *Watership Down*, *Tom and Vicky*, *A Monkey’s Tale*, *The World of Peter Rabbit* and *Friends and Jellikins*; *Santa’s Special Delivery*.

“I’m so well cast as Edwin,” Rik says. “He reflects perfectly the wily nature of the way I perform. I’m an old comic and animators like that. It gives them a lot to work with. They have done a great job here with Edwin’s wings and the way he struts up and down looking terribly haughty. It’s so ME.”

ALAN CUMMING IS BRUNO THE BEAR



Scots actor Alan Cumming may have been catapulted from Carnoustie to superstardom but he is not a man to be typecast.

The smooth star of Xmen 2, GoldenEye and Josie and the Pussycats, now has his pick of roles in Hollywood but he told BBC Scotland bosses he was happy to provide the voice of bumbling Bruno the Bear, simply because he liked what he saw of the script and their passion for the project.

Alan, who has been in Australia filming Son of the Mask, says: "I love stories where seemingly normal things turn fantastico. It's also nice that a girl is the main character. Most of all, I was excited by the people making the show and their enthusiasm about it."

Alan's animated character in the series, Bruno, is a well-meaning, if bumbling bear. Unlike his fellow Shoebox Zoo inhabitants he is desperate to get to grips with the 21st century.

In direct contrast to Edwin the Eagle, who is bamboozled by technology, Bruno has an innate curiosity that means he can't pass a button without pushing it... even if it is on a washing machine with Wolfgang inside.

"I loved Bruno," he raves. "He is a little dim, but has a good heart. You can't help liking him. Maybe it's because he's so dim, but he never gives up or gets too disheartened and he is also full of surprises."

Perthshire-born Alan, who now has homes in London and Los Angeles, spent a few days last summer recording the voice of Bruno the Bear. The recording sessions heralded a welcome reunion for Alan and old friend and fellow Scot, Siobhan Redmond.

"Siobhan was in the very first play I ever did as a professional actor," explains Alan, who graduated from the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama in Glasgow in 1985.



"It was Macbeth, she was Lady Macduff and I was Malcolm. We also did a new play, Macbeth Possessed, at the same time and during one performance Siobhan laughed in her own death scene. That's when I knew I liked her.

"The recording sessions were a relaxed affair because everyone involved knew each other. I had made a film with Rik about 10 years ago," Alan explains. "It was one of his Rik Mayall series, called Micky Love. Simon, I had met, but not worked with."

Alan is no stranger to playing the voice of an animated character.

"I was the voice of Black Beauty in the movie Black Beauty a few years ago. I also play the devil in an animated series in America called The God, the Devil and Bob.

"I've also done a few films where there's been CGI stuff like the Spy Kids films and X-Men United and was also in the Flintstones in Viva Rock Vegas. In that, I was dangled on wires and had to do lines with paper plates that had 'Fred' and 'Barney' written on them! I like doing animated shows," he adds, "because you don't have to look good in the mornings."

SIMON CALLOW IS WOLFGANG THE WOLF



For the multi-talented Simon Callow, playing the Shoebox Zoo character of Wolfgang the Wolf provided the ideal opportunity to practice his howling technique.

“Yes, my howling really was exceptional,” grins the actor, probably best known to viewers as Gareth, the bon viveur who dropped down dead at a Highland wedding in *Four Weddings and a Funeral*.

“It has stood me in good stead since as I have gone on to own two dogs. They seem to like my howling too.”

A wily individual, Wolfgang is always on the lookout for number one and his main role in the drama is to act as spy for evil Professor Toledo as he attempts to find the Book of Forbidden Knowledge.

“He is a cunning, wicked individual,” explains Simon, who has won acclaim as a director and a writer as well as an actor. “Wolfgang had ideals once, as a young wolf cub. Life has taught him to be cunning.”

For Simon, who is set to appear as Andre in the forthcoming film of *Phantom of the Opera*, working on Shoebox Zoo had a special significance because it meant he finally got to work with his old friend, Shoebox Zoo Lead Writer, Brian Ward.

“We have known each other for over 25 years,” he says. “I had a partner back then who was Turkish and he attended the British Film School with Brian. Brian was one of a wonderfully anarchic Scottish contingent at the school and we all got on wonderfully well.”



“I would have done Shoebox Zoo anyway because it is wonderfully written and a fully imagined world but it had added significance for me because Brian was involved.”

For Simon, the few days spent recording the voice of Wolfgang were ‘hugely enjoyable’.

“Voiceovers are fun because you don’t have to worry about how you look and you are not obliged to learn your lines. It means you can be more flexible. I have done quite a bit of work as an animated character, working on *James and the Giant Peach* as a giant grasshopper and *George and the Dragon*, as the dragon.”

It was the first time Simon had worked alongside fellow Shoeboxers and he admits he enjoyed it immensely.

“We all screamed with laughter as we each recorded our parts. It’s interesting that they record you as you say your lines to see how you move and so on because I don’t think I am particularly lupine. You might think Alan Cumming is not particularly bear-like but there was something very cuddly about him!” For Simon, the next part of the fun, he says, will be viewing the series as a completed entity.

“When you record voices, you are only involved in a production for a very short period and you know nothing of the live action. I am really looking forward to seeing the completed series. I think it is going to be fantastic.”

BILL PATERSON IS THE VOICE OF THE STORYTELLER

Known most recently for his role in spooky BBC Drama *Sea of Souls*, Scottish actor Bill Paterson was delighted to be asked to provide the distinguished and knowing voice of The Storyteller in *Shoebbox Zoo*.

Claire Mundell, Executive Producer and Co-creator for the series, explains the importance of the role: “The Storyteller guides us through the epic and tells the story from a position of knowledge. *Shoebbox Zoo* is such a classic tale comprising of many elements, the idea of having a narrator is a classic device.

“He is our connection between the past and the present.”

A first time for Bill to work on a children’s drama, he thoroughly enjoyed adding emotion, intrigue and menace to the story which he believes will excite a wide audience.

Bill, who recorded his piece in May this year, explains: “I think it has a nice blend of fantasy and humour which should appeal to grown ups as well as their kids. I particularly liked the voices and animation.

“I hope *Shoebbox Zoo* will give the viewers the same buzz of excitement and promise that it gave me when I first read it.”

EPISODE SYNOPSES

EPISODE 1

The Magic is Awakened

It’s the worst birthday of Marnie McBride’s life. Still grieving from her mom’s death and Marnie’s recent move from Colorado to Scotland, she sees no reason to celebrate turning 11, despite Dad’s best efforts. But, unbeknownst to Marnie she’s about to be touched by a dangerous and irresistible magic.

When Dad wants to stop in an old junk shop, Marnie begrudgingly agrees, unaware that her fate lies inside. The mysterious man behind the counter seems out of place somehow, and Marnie waits for Dad tentatively by the door. When the strange man encourages Marnie towards a shoebox, she opens it cautiously and finds it filled with four toy animals – a snake, a bear, a wolf and an eagle.

As the clock strikes 11, the man rushes Marnie and Dad out of the shop, insisting Marnie take the toys as a birthday gift. “How did he know it was your birthday?” asks Dad. Marnie shrugs.

The next day, Marnie finds herself drawn to the toys. She cleans them up and sets them out on the counter, playing at magic words that would make them come alive. To her shock, she does wake them up – but just as quickly, the animals – the *Shoebbox Zoo* – are frozen once again.

Unable to explain her newfound powers, Marnie goes to return the *Shoebbox Zoo* to the junk shop, and stops dead when she rounds the corner of the alley and realises that the shop has disappeared!

EPISODE 2

Friend or Foe?

It’s Marnie’s first day of school in Scotland. Not only is she the new kid, but she’s late, and having trouble finding her class. Marnie could not feel more out of place, not to mention the strange birthday gift from the man at the junk shop - the *Shoebbox Zoo* – toys that come alive and talk to her.

After Marnie discovers the *Shoebbox Zoo* have hitched a ride in her backpack, a couple of bullies overhear her, and try to take them away. She steps up to protect the *Shoebbox Zoo*, not fully understanding the power that draws her to them. When her sinister new classmate, John Roberts, hypnotizes the bullies and hands Marnie back her toys, she is unsure whether to feel relieved or put off from the help of this unlikely ally.

Back at home, Marnie pressures the *Shoebbox Zoo* for answers, and discovers that the four were students of the great alchemist Michael Scot. They were human once, eleven hundred years ago! Now trapped in the form of carvings, the only way for them to become human again is to recover Michael Scot’s great work: *The Book of Forbidden Knowledge*.

It’s a lot to believe and Marnie is glad to be distracted by Dad calling her to go pick up a package: a belated birthday present arrives from Marnie’s grandma and grandpa. Unbeknownst to Marnie, the waking of the *Shoebbox Zoo* has attracted the attention of Michael Scot’s nemesis: Toledo the Shapeshifter, and he’s waiting inside the depot for her.

