



## Primetime Humor Cracks Up in Harmony

Even though Echo Media may look like a newly-formed company, it actually brings together the television and feature film production arms of Équipe Spectra, a powerful and well established Quebec entertainment group. Created by Luc Châtelain in 2010, Echo Media serves as the main umbrella for Spectra Animation, Films Zingaro, Amérimage, Spectra Virage and Sogestalt.

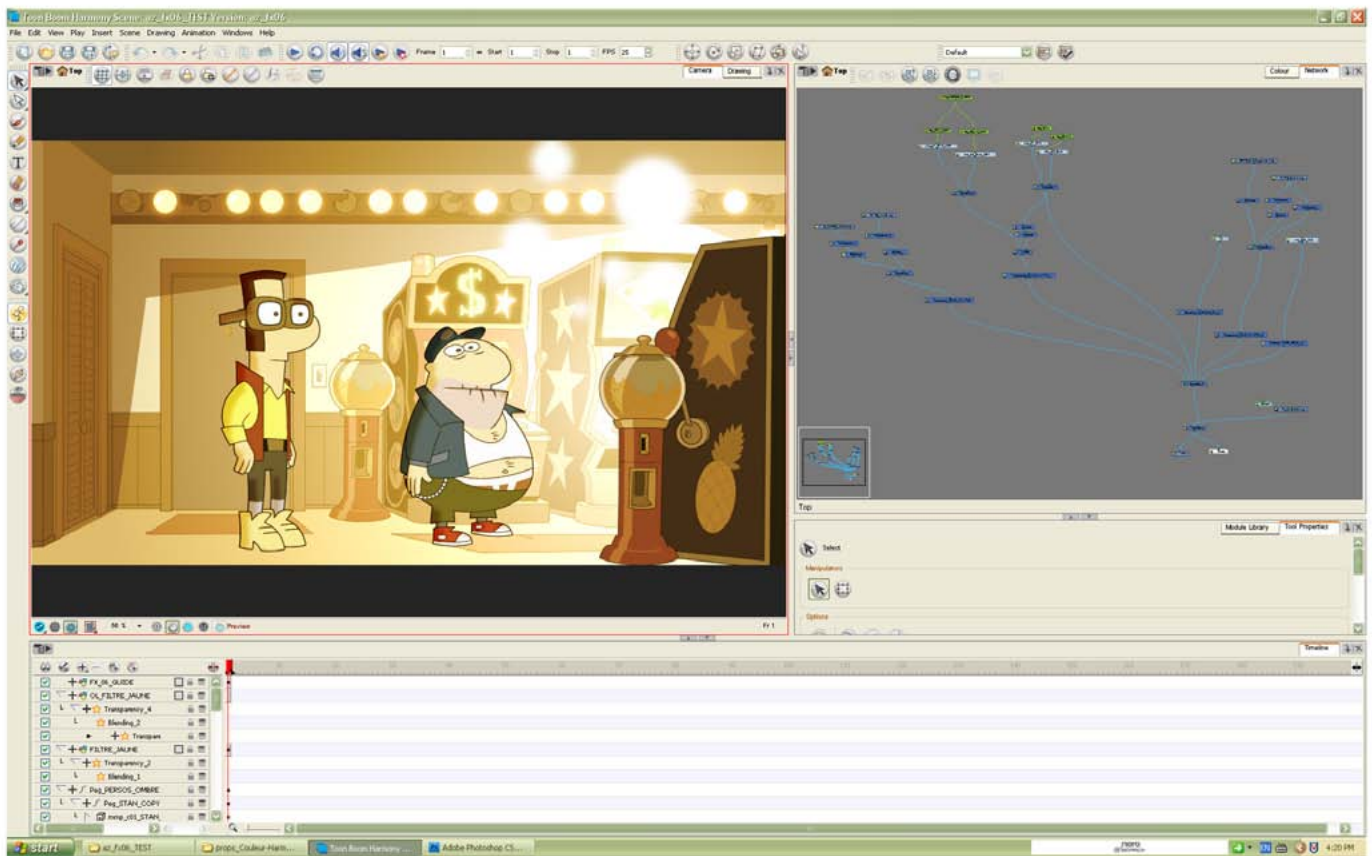
Echo Media has a remarkable track record in producing excellent programming for youth. As an example, *Toopy and Binoo* has been an overnight success in Canada and has also been sold to over 150 countries.

Working closely with its creators, Echo Media has managed to keep the authenticity and integrity of their projects. This is once again reflected in their new project entitled *Life on the Block*.

Created by Christian and Yvon Tremblay, *Life on the Block* is a series of 26, twenty-two minute episodes based on the hilarious characters from Lévesque & Turcotte's highly successful comedy show. *Life on the Block* is done entirely using the Toon Boom pipeline, and will air in primetime on Radio Canada. International distribution is being handled by Toonz US who are already negotiating several opportunities with international broadcasters.



**HARMONY**



Produced by Dominique Mendel<sup>1</sup> and directed by Sylvain Lavoie<sup>2</sup>, this project gathered a great team of writers, both English and French to preserve the snappy humour that will become *Life on the Block's* trademark. The plot is set in an apartment building owned by Stan Tucker, as the hilarious characters come across each other they also manage to make Stan's life miserable. For him, life is totally upside down. His inherited apartment building is a fixer-upper's nightmare, his tenants are twisted, his teenage daughter and her 6 year-old kid drive him crazy, and his best friend's a crook! Yet, to Stan, they're all family and he'll do anything to protect his world from falling apart.

Produced over a period of 18 months, *Life on the Block* is created entirely using hand drawn cut-out animation. Having worked in Flash and After Effects in previous productions, Dominique Mendel had planned to undertake this project using that same technology. However, right before starting the production, she re-evaluated her decision and decided to adopt the Toon Boom pipeline instead. "Between Storyboard Pro and Harmony, we felt the benefits of using such a complete pipeline from pre-production to final rendering were tremendous. Compared to our previous set-up, the powerful animation capabilities and integrated workflow were by far superior," stated Dominique.

Another important component relates to asset management in Harmony. "Our goal was to use a robust technology that could carry the project in the years to come, not only in the asset library and reuse front, but also, on the technology front. Harmony is continuously evolving to meet studios' needs and push the creative envelope further," added Dominique.

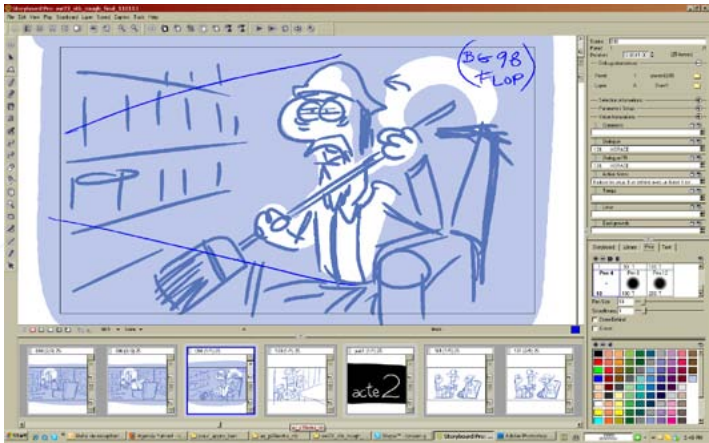
Producing a cut-out series implies the creation of several backgrounds, rigged characters and animated sequences, all stored in the library for future re-use. This will be an added advantage when it comes time to create the next season, as the team will be able to access all these assets with ease.



Approximately sixty people worked on *Life on the Block Season 1*. The pre-production was done at Echo Media while the animation was done at Toutenkartoon Canada (TTK). Sylvain Lavoie used Storyboard Pro to create the rough boards, including camera moves. "I love working with Storyboard Pro for many reasons. First, it speeds up the revision process tremendously. Secondly, it enables us to deliver more accurate information to the animation team. Thirdly, Storyboard Pro enables us to build the asset library and reuse them [the assets] as needed. Finally, it is so convenient to be able to drag and drop the script into the dialog boxes and add the necessary action notes. Not only do we not waste paper anymore, but also we no longer need the photocopier and post-it papers!" stated Sylvain.

Echo Media and TTK's were pleased to find an excellent pool of talent already trained on Toon Boom Harmony, most of them coming from the highly-praised Cegep du Vieux Montreal. Having such a solid foundation in animation, their integration into the studio was very smooth. Interestingly enough, a few members of the team come from different backgrounds and have found the digital world a great place to connect with the younger generation.

Considering Harmony's leading-edge capabilities, more and more studios are choosing to keep the entire production process under one roof, or at the very least local, thereby gaining an advantage in quality control, cost and speed. Echo Media confirms that trend and sees





tangible benefits in maintaining such close proximity to its production team. Once the storyboards, colour palettes and effects library are approved, they are passed on to the TTK's team for them to start the animation creation. "All creative development comes from Echo Media and the process is very smooth. We are quite pleased by the quality of the project," stated Dominique.

*Life on the Block* delivers loads of humour that will be appreciated by audiences throughout the world. Echo Media is already keeping the momentum going by writing the script for Season II, so make sure to watch it when it comes in your neighbourhood! •

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