



Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa Production Notes

Release Date: November 7, 2008 (conventional theaters and IMAX)

Studio: DreamWorks Animation

Director: Eric Darnell, Tom McGrath

Starring: Ben Stiller, Chris Rock, David Schwimmer, Jada Pinkett Smith, Sacha Baron Cohen, Cedric the Entertainer, Andy Richter, Bernie Mac, Sherri Shepherd, Alec Baldwin, Will.i.am

Genre: Adventure, Animation, Comedy, Family, Fantasy

MPAA Rating: PG (for some mild crude humor)

Left marooned on the distant shores of Madagascar, the New Yorkers have hatched a plan so crazy it just might work. With military precision, the penguins have repaired an old crashed plane - sort of. Once aloft, this unlikely crew stays airborne just long enough to make it to the wildest place of all - the vast plains of Africa itself -- where our zoo-raised crew encounters species of their own kind for the very first time. While discovering their roots, they quickly realize the difference between the concrete jungle and the heart of Africa. Despite long-lost relatives, reomantic rivals and scheming hunters, Africa seems like a "crack-a-lackin' great place..but is it better than their Central Park home?

About The Production

In the summer of 2005, “Madagascar” scored big with both domestic and international audiences, racking up more than half-a-billion at the worldwide box office, making it the top family comedy of the year. Once the fancy-footed lion, a quick talking zebra, an anxiety-ridden giraffe and a smart ‘n saucy hippo were released into theaters around the globe, these four New York friends—better known as Alex, Marty, Melman and Gloria—became the most popular quartet of the season.

Writer/director Eric Darnell remembers being relieved by the reception of “Madagascar,” but not really that surprised. He says, ““Madagascar’ was a success because it had these entertaining and enjoyable characters that people could identify with—they also connected with them on a human level. And despite their flaws, their issues, their anxieties, whatever problems they may be facing, you always empathize with them and want them to come through.”

Writer/director Tom McGrath continues, “We just fell in love with the characters that we created along with Ben Stiller, Chris Rock, David Schwimmer and Jada Pinkett Smith—and clearly,

everyone else did, too. We had this great ensemble cast that we just totally loved. We took on the theme of civility versus savagery and turned that into a friendship story about these zoo animals, when their bonds were tested once they got into the wild. Even at the time we ended the first movie—before it became this huge hit—we were thinking that we could do so much more with these characters.”

Producer Mireille Soria also reasons, “There is something about the design that people love. And I think that’s part of it—they’re very graphic—along with being smart and funny. The first movie was about the importance of friendship and what it means to be a good friend. One of the things that is so great about New York is its diversity, and that is reflected in our group—a lion, a giraffe, a zebra and a hippo who are best friends. And that was something we thought we could explore even further. And we could also celebrate that.”

It was this desire to continue the exploration of the four zoosters that the “Madagascar” filmmakers and DreamWorks Animation’s Chief Executive Officer Jeffrey Katzenberg took with them onto a jet bound for the European premiere. McGrath explains, “Even before the movie became as popular as it was, we wanted to do another movie with the characters. We were on our way to Europe and on that plane, we just started hashing out a story—what if our characters went to Africa, their homeland where they supposedly belong? This was a wonderful way to continue the ‘fish out of water’ story—four New Yorkers on the plains of Africa.”

While the original directors and producer began to explore this new storyline, “Madagascar” continued to play to enthusiastic response from moviegoers everywhere. As the new project began to take shape, producer Mark Swift joined the team. Swift says, “While Mireille was busy finishing ‘Madagascar,’ I worked on the short with the penguins called ‘A Christmas Caper.’ So I guess the penguins brought me into the second film.”

For Darnell and McGrath, it meant the continuance of a working relationship that had already proved to be a good one. Per Darnell: “The reason why Tom and I work so well together, I think, is because we can take each other’s ideas, turn them around and take them to the next level—we bounce them back and forth and come up with something that’s stronger than the sum of the parts. We try to be together as often as we can, approve things together and try to work as one mind as much as possible. Sometimes the needs of production demand that we split up—one of us in animation, one of us in a recording session—and we do that when we have to. But, frankly, the more we’re together in the same place at the same time, the better for us.”

The two met at DreamWorks more than eight years ago and found an instant artistic connection. “Madagascar” gave them the opportunity to work together, as a team. Tom McGrath: “We both often switch our hats around—when working on, say, the drama of the scene or the comedy of the scene—and we’ll swap duties. Because we’re writing partners, it helps us to create a singular vision for the film. And then, in our duties on the film, we try to stay together as much as we can, splitting duties when required—I mean, there are hundreds and hundreds of people working on this film, and we can’t always be in just one place. But when it gets into editorial, that’s where we really get to sit together and focus on our film—we are fortunate to now have done two films together.”

For Soria, the re-teaming was essential: “As the writers and the directors, they embody ‘Madagascar.’ They both bring different sensibilities and we get to take advantage of both of their great talents. One of the nice things about this sequel is that we were able to get Tom and Eric, and many of our department heads who were also on the first film [writer/directors Darnell and McGrath, production designer Kendal Cronkhite, visual effects supervisor Philippe Gluckman, head of character animation Rex Grignon, senior supervising animator Denis Couchon, music executive Sunny Park and Soria herself]. We had an opportunity to return to something that we loved and continue it. And we already had a shorthand—a lot of that ‘Oh, did I step on your toes?’ kind of thing...we’d already been there, done that!”

No matter who would be onboard, the filmmakers knew that without a good, workable story, continuing the journey would be rather fruitless. Mark Swift observes, “The story always comes first. And since ‘Madagascar,’ everybody loves these characters, so they have to have these characters back. They are like a family. It wouldn’t be quite the same if they weren’t there. So, we needed to focus on a story that was inclusive. And Tom and Eric and Etan Cohen wrote a wonderful script.”

Writer/director Darnell offers, “It’s kind of like a chain reaction. When the New Yorkers get on that plane in Madagascar to take off, who is on that plane? Well, it’s Air Penguin, they had to fix the plane and pilot the plane. So on with the penguins. You can’t leave Julien and Maurice and Mort behind. They’re funny. They’re part of the group, just like the chimps, Phil and Mason. And boom, you’ve got a big entourage. So we needed to service these characters, but also the characters they meet in Africa—that’s a big balancing act.”

It was precisely the popularity of the characters—not just the zoosters, but also Julien and his cohorts, the penguins, the chimps—that provided one of the biggest challenges. Writer/director McGrath explains, “Because you love all these characters, you want to spend time with all of them, but it’s very hard to juggle independent storylines. And so, that’s always a challenge. I think we pulled it off. All of our secondary stories support the main story, which is tough to do with a cast of, what, 13 characters?”

The writers put Alex at the core of the film, along with his story of meeting his parents, who turn out to be completely different. Alex is the King of New York, the showman, a star—probably not skills that go very far on the vast plains of Africa. For Marty, who’s always dreamed of running with the herd, how does it really work, to be part of an enormous group of zebras who are...exactly like you? Gloria, now a little more grown up, feels it may be time to explore a relationship and has the opportunity to do just that. Melman not only finds himself included in a tower of giraffes (yes, that’s the official group name!), but also facing his true feelings for Gloria...just in time to see her being romanced by another.

The writers reasoned that while the first film had a wealth of broad moments, it also had subtle, quiet beats, where characters were discovering something within themselves. With this storyline of exploration—to be part of a family, part of a group—there were more opportunities for such times. Each zooster undergoes some sort of inner exploration (who am I really? what is it I really want? is it love or infatuation?), which meant bigger challenges for the animators: to manifest

these emotional searches on the outside. In short, the zoosters would need to beef up their acting chops, courtesy of their creators.

While McGrath finishes, “It’s a whole different set of challenges, but that’s what our animators are trained to do. They’re all really actors at heart who may not want to step out onstage themselves, but they’ll push their animated creations out there and see what they can do.”

With the filmmakers’ desire to take the “Madagascar” characters deeper, with storylines that were still comedic, but now tinged with a little more emotional depth, would this appeal to the actors who helped to create such memorable personalities in the first place? All the actors were pitched the story, and all were sold on the idea—the spark was there, and so was the returning cast.

The filmmakers also wisely reasoned that with regard to taking the characters further, revealing more of what makes them tick, they had invaluable tools right in front of them (well, figuratively speaking, that is)...the actors themselves. Having brought them to life the first time around, they would know the zoosters inside and out, as it were. And the key to further exploration of Alex, Marty, Gloria and Melman was something the four actors who voiced them all possessed—the ability to explore a character, along with the knack for improvisation.

Darnell describes, “We just give these guys a chance to do what they do best—to just become these characters and let stuff come out. We just get incredible, hilarious— and sometimes touching—stuff. You know, it’s the best seat in town. There’s no place you’d rather be than on the other side of the glass during a recording session. It’s better than any theater or playhouse.”

All riffs aside, however, there has to be groundwork in place to support the actors—plot perimeters. So, with the decision to plop them down on the African mainland, other logical script developments follow...they would meet others of their own kind, which would give the New Yorker the chance to see who they were, allow them to test the nurture-versus-nature conundrum and ultimately, to explore where they belonged. But for Alex the lion, filmmakers wanted to take the journey closer to home—in fact, take Alex home, where he is reunited with his father and mother, who lost him to poachers when he was a cub. As his father is the alpha lion in the pride, both he and his father have certain expectations of the other—how is a show business lion going to fit into the rough and tumble African world?

“Let’s just say that Alex isn’t at his best when he’s thrown by something,” explains Ben Stiller. “Even though he’s been through the sort of ‘Jungle 101’ in Madagascar, the stakes are so much higher in Africa, and the world is so much bigger. And since his birth family is there, and his dad happens to be the alpha lion of the pride, expectations are also very high. At first, Alex thinks that it’s all under control—he’ll just do what he does back home and that should prove his worth. He didn’t get to be the King of New York, the star of the zoo, for nothing.”

What follows is a misunderstanding, a difference of cultures, and Alex has to play by the rules of this brave new world, where the losers—to use the show business vernacular—don’t get the part. This all comes as a big shock to Alex.

For Marty the zebra, his journey isn't about exploring differences so much as similarities. Back home, Marty always dreamed of being in the wild, roaming with his kind. Now, he has that chance...boy, does he have that chance.

Chris Rock says, "There are people in this world who always think that there's something bigger and better than what they got. Not that Marty doesn't appreciate his friends and all that, but he has it in his head that running with his kind is the ultimate. I mean, it stands to reason—he's a rockin' guy, so why wouldn't the party be even better if he was surrounded by a lot of other cool dudes who share his interests?"

On the surface, that logic holds true. The old adage of the more, the merrier. But psychologists will tell you that it is the differences that enrich the group as a whole. Rock adds, "It's like, if your best friend starts acting like you—dressing like you do, talking like you. At first, it's probably an ego booster, right, imitation and flattery, whatever. But then, it would start to get irritating and pretty soon you'd probably start considering the use of a firearm. Now take that and multiply it by hundreds—all of 'em acting exactly like Marty. No wonder the guy has a breakdown. How are you you when everyone else is you as well?"

Most of the time, Melman, the hypochondriac giraffe, probably wishes he were less himself. Away from his regime (and meds) in the Central Park Zoo, Melman matured a bit in the homeopathic world of Madagascar—well, maybe became just a little less neurotic. But there are still issues for him to face, namely his affection for Gloria...along with his health, of course.

David Schwimmer relates, "There are some pretty dramatic things that happen to Melman this time around. When he's sure that the plane they're on is going to crash, he finally confesses his love for Gloria, who's sound asleep, unfortunately. Then, all of his self-taught medical knowledge earns him the place of witch doctor to all the other giraffes. And when he thinks his life is over yet again, he volunteers to sacrifice himself to save Gloria and his friends. I mean, that's a lot for one movie."

While the actor relishes the chance to return to the character, along with the freedom to improv, it is a logistical concern that he still finds a challenge when portraying Melman: "I'm still amazed at how the actors are edited to make it seem like we're all in the scene together. Since we don't record together, it's a challenge not to be able to improv off of another actor, so my strategy is to give the directors as much as possible. That way, they have the flexibility in the editing room to put the performance together. In the end, what's really strange is seeing the result and noticing that the animators have given Melman some of my own qualities and behaviors. Regarding giraffe behaviors, though, I did my research the first time around, but I didn't do any new research for this film. I hope it doesn't show."

Gloria the hippo has no issues with her self-image. She's well aware of who she is, thank you very much. She's self-confident, sassy and sweet. When she encounters a bloat (again, the correct term) of hippos at the watering hole, she welcomes them as they do her—and some really welcome her, like the heartthrob Moto Moto.

Jada Pinkett Smith was enthusiastic to return to the characters of “Madagascar”: “That film (‘Madagascar’) was the first movie of mine my kids could actually watch. Well, I think it’s always important for women to see various images of themselves and understand that it’s all about what you project from the inside out. Gloria has so much confidence and really just loves who she is. I would hope the film sends a message to young girls that it’s about how you perceive yourself that’s really important. In this movie, I get to have fun, and also maybe send a little message.”

Having been to Africa, Pinkett Smith is awestruck by the country: “Africa is a very hard place to describe. It’s almost more of a feeling that it gives you versus any observation of it. I mean, it’s magnificently beautiful—I actually went on a safari. My husband says it better than I ever can when he says, ‘God visits every place else in the world...but actually lives in Africa.’ And that’s the only way I can really explain it—it’s very spiritual, and you just feel very rooted.”

As a lot of “Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa” deals with roots and identity, it is probably expected that moviegoers will get to see a glimpse of our characters as baby animals. And who better to play a baby Alex than Stiller’s own son, Quinlan?

Tom McGrath tells, “Ben Stiller didn’t have any kids when we started the first movie, and now he has two. So we asked him, ‘Hey, could Quinn be you as a little cub?’ So his wife brought Quinn in and put him in the studio. The character really doesn’t speak that much, it’s mostly laughter and things. Quinn was perfect. When recording kids, you’re never gonna get what you want out of them if you ask them for it...it’s all the stuff in between recording that you end up using.”

Actors routinely sit in tall director chairs when recording, and while in the studio, Quinlan thought the chair was too high—when he began to wince or cry a little, the engineers were ready, and captured all of the noises...a lot of which wound up in the character of baby Alex.

Jada’s daughter Willow—true to form—was also the perfect voice for the baby Gloria. Filmmakers were duly impressed with her self-assurance and sass, something she shares with her mother. Like mother, like daughter, the recording sessions also proved to be a playground for fun. Willow Smith reasons, “Because the lines...like if we mess up, it’s really, really fun, because I laugh, and then they laugh...and then it’s really fun.”

Additional Passengers on Air Penguin

And speaking of self-assured characters who love a laugh—you could even go so far as to say self-centered characters who demand you laugh—who could forget the party-loving leader of the lemurs, Julien?

To hitch along with the departing New Yorkers, Julien informs them that the repaired plane happens to be his (animators didn’t care what justification, they just wanted him along!). His actual motivation is to expand his kingdom—and what better place than New York City? Setting foot in Africa, however, he is no less enthusiastic, for now he has an entire land to conquer...but

the furthest thing from Julien's mind is any kind of military campaign. He's so fabulous, his mere presence should inspire legions to simply follow—right?

Eric Darnell declares, “Julien is a great character, because of the attitude and the off-kilter point of view that he brings. And who else could do Julien but Sacha Baron Cohen? There's this controlled insanity to what he brings, how he reads the lines and what he adds to the character. No matter what he says, you just can't help but laugh and love him.”

And no king can function without an attendant—and right-hand men don't come any better than the king's own cousin, Maurice. Voiced again with the easygoing baritone of Cedric The Entertainer, the character proves a wonderful counterpoint to the sometimes frantic Julien—making the pair a kind of Laurel and Hardy duo. For reasons only known to himself, Maurice loves Julien, in spite of the king's flaws and out-of-leftfield actions, and is able to put all of Julien's shortcomings aside and be there for his king.

Cedric has his own theory about the relationship between the two: “I think that Maurice is now looking for that validation from the king, something like ‘Hey, man, you know, I appreciate your years of service. You're my main man and here you go.’ And at the same time, he's a little comfortable in his position, he likes being next to the man. You're always first in the door whenever you're with the king, you're gonna get first class A treatment. Everybody's gonna do it for ya'. And even though I think this guy's a little bit of a bum sometimes...well, he's my cousin.”

There is no such familial excuse for the behavior visited by the king on his subject, saucer-eyed, mouse lemur Mort, even though the little guy is extremely devoted to Julien...unfortunately, Julien isn't as devoted to Mort. Left off the Air Penguin flight scheduled for New York City (with an extended layover in Africa), the scrappy and tenacious Mort finds his own way to the stranded group—he swims the shark-infested waters of the Mozambique Channel. Andy Richter returns as the voice of Mort, who can miraculously deliver an entire performance in falsetto and remain cute.

Per Richter: “I get my biggest reactions from really little kids, something about his tiny cuteness...and probably the slightly irritating nature of his personality, which also appeals to children. In actuality—not to bite the hand that feeds me—it's among the most absurd ways I've ever made money. To stand in a windowless room, screaming like a little girl and getting paid for it, I mean, I can't really call it a dream come true, because I didn't have the good sense to have that dream. If I had a time machine, I'd go back and dream about this. And then it would be coming true.”

And what would Air Penguin be without penguins? The military quartet emerged from “Madagascar” with a solid fan base, resulting in a short film and an upcoming animated series. Not bad for flightless birds who, in the previous film, longed for Antarctica, only to find the cold not to their liking. Back with the other displaced zoosters in Madagascar, the four have worked their organizational magic, repaired the abandoned plane and now are in charge of piloting it—sadly, only across the channel to Africa. Once there, they throw themselves into the task of getting the plane back together by applying “spit, grit and a lot of duct tape.” However, they will

also need parts (thanks to some hijacked tourist SUVs) and plenty of opposable thumbs (thanks to legions of chimps recruited by Phil and Mason).

Writer/director McGrath—who also happens to voice the penguin’s leader, Skipper—comments, “The penguins are fun, you know, and people really liked the penguins on the first movie. It’s great to put them in situations and see how their little military minds react. I guess I landed the part of Skipper because I’m cheap. I’m sort of a poor man’s version of Charlton Heston and Robert Stack—kind of a tough thinking man’s man—or penguin’s penguin. This film is a unique opportunity for Skipper, who already has his team, and now he gets a love interest. She’s a dashboard hula doll—we thought she’d be the perfect size, and she gets to shake all through the crash sequence. It started as a joke, but we kept it going.”

Chris Miller is also ‘kept going’ as penguin Kowalski: “I’m not surprised at their success—you’d have to have a mighty hard heart not to like a penguin. I remember when I was working on the first film [as a story artist] at the time and Tom really came up with the concept of the penguins and wrote a scene. When he went to record it, he just sort of grabbed a bunch of bodies and I just happened to be in the room. And that’s really how I got the job, I think. No other reason why I would still be a penguin, except I just happened to be there when Tom said, ‘Come down and let’s record you.’”

Christopher Knights, who voices Private, counts himself lucky as well. He had performed some temp voices for “Shrek,” and then ended up voicing the Executioner and one of the Blind Mice. Since then, his voice has been heard in practically every DreamWorks Animation release. Knights notices, “They seem to have probably doubled the amount of time the penguins had onscreen in the first one, and I think their role has been upped—the plane is key to this film. Now they play a very important part in this movie. Don’t underestimate the power of the penguins.”

Powerful as they may be, they aren’t the best candidates to hold a screwdriver. So they conscript Mason and Phil, the chimpanzees, who clearly don’t want to do the work themselves...so they outsource it to their new African chimp acquaintances. Eric Darnell explains, “The monkeys bring back about 10,000 other monkeys, who start dismantling what’s left of the old plane. The four New Yorkers argue, sending them on their separate ways in this strange new world. Eventually, the monkeys go on strike, because they feel they’re being exploited, denied things like maternity leave and a dental plan.”

Mason is again voiced by Conrad Vernon—story artist, writer and director, now helming the 2009 DreamWorks 3D film “Monsters vs. Aliens.” Vernon admits, “When people find out it’s my voice, they can’t believe it’s me. I started doing this kind of James Mason with a cheesy accent, which has twisted its way into just some upper class chimpanzee with a voice of his own. It’s interesting, but it doesn’t sound like me. That’s why I think most people are surprised when they hear I do the voice. Voice work is something I do on the side for DreamWorks, but I love doing it.”

Some New Faces In The Pride

An arrival in a new country is pretty much a guarantee of new faces. You never know whom you might meet or what opportunities may arise as you are introduced to more of your species, like friends who share your style, a possible new vocation, a potential new love interest or...your long-lost parents.

Producer Swift: “The first ‘Madagascar’ basically dealt with who these characters were and what they meant to each other. On the savanna, our four are faced with their own kind—a lot of them. So there’s now comparison to other lions, zebras, giraffes and hippos—so they get to see how they’re alike and how they’re different from others like them. And on top of that, their friendships are tested, too.”

Character designer Andrew Bialk supplies, “The basic look of the characters in ‘Madagascar’ was inspired by a style of illustration in children’s books from the 1950s. They have a lot of very sharp lines, contrasted with curved lines, so you get a very nice graphic illustration. Bringing that to the screen originally was a challenge. Now, it becomes our challenge to continue that language for all the existing characters, as well as the majority of the new characters.”

So about Alex’s parents...

McGrath says, “We wanted Alex’s dad to be the tough, macho, alpha lion. But we didn’t want him to be some drill sergeant, so we were really sensitive as to who would make a great voice—who could be tough, but also convey that there was paternal emotion underneath all of it. We wanted to make sure that there was some fatherly warmth, even while the script called for some lines that sound a little tough.”

Enter Bernie Mac, whom filmmakers felt had the perfect balance of toughness and fatherly warmth in his tone and would make an ideal voice for Zuba, the alpha lion of the pride. As to the family resemblance...well, it is there, but the years of holding the pride together have left Zuba with a grayish mane, slightly receding, and a few scars. Eric Darnell tells, “When we were writing Zuba and thinking about this character, it was really difficult to find the right tone, exactly what this father-son relationship was going to be. But when we brought Bernie Mac on, he has got such a warmth, such a paternal quality to the way that he performs this role of Zuba, that you forgive him. You forgive him his faults, you forgive him his mistakes, as a parent. And you want nothing more than for Alex and Zuba to reconcile.”

While filmmakers were heavy into post-production in August of 2008, they learned of Bernie Mac’s passing at age 50. The loss of one of the newest members of the “Madagascar” family was keenly felt by everyone connected with the film. Head of DreamWorks Animation Jeffrey Katzenberg speaks for all when he says, “It is unthinkable that we could suddenly wake up one day and find that such an extraordinary talent, wonderful man and bigger-than-life personality had just unexpectedly passed from our lives. It’s impossible to overstate how great his gifts and contributions to our movie have been.”

For Alex’s Mom, writer/directors and producers were searching for that TV mom—a cushy lap, bedtime stories and homemade cookies on weekends (if lionesses baked cookies). But they also

didn't want a doormat to Zuba. So the goal was soft but strong, a mate to Zuba with some toughness and compassion in her heart.

After listening to voices brought to them by casting—the directors rarely 'see' actors, it's all about the voice—filmmakers chose Sherri Shepherd for the quality of her voice and her sincere and warm laughter.

Per McGrath: "Sherri Shepherd brought this great quality to Alex's Mom. It's pivotal, because she has to stand up between the fighting father and son and be strong, without being brash. Sherri manages to mix a little bit of attitude and strength—she can stand up to Zuba and empathize with Alex, and she can put them both in their places when the situation calls for it."

The crash of Air Penguin's maiden flight turns out to be a blessing for Gloria, who had wanted to jumpstart her dating life for awhile. She is hoping to return to New York and become involved in the zoo exchange programs, to give herself a shot at love. But once in Africa, a whole world of possibilities opens up. And a girl as special as Gloria needs a special guy...for the object of Gloria's affection, filmmakers and animators dreamed up the answer to every female hippo's dreams—a chunky hunk named Moto Moto (literally "hot hot" in Swahili).

Character designer Andrew Bialk explains, "We knew that Moto Moto would be a womanizer, a bit of a sexist, so we combined the blocky, stout square shapes of a 1950s wrestler with the vanity of a Fabio type."

When looking to find the right performer to breathe verbal life into God's gift to the watering hole, the team turned to someone who was recommended by royalty (of sorts). And it went something like this...

Recording artist will.i.am of the Black Eyed Peas had been collaborating with Justin Timberlake on new material. will.i.am was going to be late to a studio session, so he phoned, his voice still deep from sleep, and left a message on Timberlake's voicemail. Timberlake remarked about the message, and from then on, the two would exchange messages using different voices. When Timberlake was signed to voice Artie, the king-yet-to-be in "Shrek the Third," he mentioned to Jeffrey Katzenberg that will was amazing at voices. Later, when Katzenberg and will met, the studio chief told the musician that he should consider doing voicework. Then, when "Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa" casting began, will received a call from Katzenberg asking if he would read.

Eric Darnell: "When will.i.am came in, he told us that he had loved 'Madagascar,' and that it'd be great if he could do a voice. And out came this Barry White-esque, lady's man voice, and we just looked at each other and couldn't believe it. To have that voice coming out of Moto Moto would be just perfect."

will.i.am comments, "'Madagascar' is one of our favorite movies. I think I've seen it, like, 500 times. We were in Johannesburg, in the airport, and our tour manager says, 'C'mon, guys, we gotta move it, move it!' Like the crew, everybody, we use 'move it, move it' all the time. It's like our whole family's favorite movie by far." Once signed, it was a natural progression that will

should collaborate with Oscar®-winning composer Hans Zimmer on the “Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa” score and songs, duties which he also assumed...sort of on the spot.

The recording artist found himself in the voiceover studio (as any actor would voicing an animated character). The moment when his character rises out of the water and first glimpses Gloria was on the page in front of him. will.i.am thought it would be fun to rhyme something—and someone in the session suggested that this special first moment should feature a song.

will.i.am recalls, “I thought, ‘Yeah, a song would be cool...that would be awesome. So I started with rhythm, like a whole bunch of other hippos sighing, and some hitting her chest, getting a beat. Other animals could clap, right? Maybe monkeys knocking their heads. You have a whole ensemble of percussion using their anatomy. Moto Moto would be conducting his jungle, if you will, as the band as he’s confessing his love for Gloria. ‘I like them big, I like them plumpy. My name is Moto Moto, you say it double. Say my name girl, Moto Moto. Say it again, Moto Moto!’”

Clearly calling the muse, will.i.am then laid down each track separately and extemporaneously—the percussion, the sighs, the vocals. The entire song was recorded in around 30 minutes...all on the fly.

He espouses, “Usually, that’s how it comes, those fast ones, those quick ones. As soon as you start digging too much, you’re thinking too much. Anybody can think too much.”

But not anybody can compose a love song for a hippo in a half-hour, or come up with a song about the search for a home from the hippopotamus perspective: “Thinking about Moto Moto, to explain his love or his desires...with my interpretation of his personality, it gives me a different angle in the studio. Most of the time, if I’m writing for Usher, I’m thinking Usher; if I’m writing it for Fergie, I’m thinking of Fergie. But since I’m writing for a character that doesn’t exist here, I can go as far as I want with it. He says stuff to the ladies I could never say.”

Working with Zimmer brought out the best in both and a singular collaboration—slickly produced, sweeping ‘big picture’ scoring, spiced with percussive, urban rhythms; African chants, choirs, harmony and beats; and a simple, folk-like guitar track. Will continues, “‘The Traveling Song’ I got as a track from Hans Zimmer, and he said, ‘Just take a listen to this.’ Then I just started, ‘reach’...my life, you know? ‘Been around the world on ships and planes, feeling out of place, really feeling strange. Take me to a place where they know my name, cause I ain’t met nobody that looks the same. I’m a fish out of water lying out of the jungle, a fish out of water lying out of the jungle.’ I brought in my perspective of always traveling, not really knowing what home is, you know?”

That perspective included his experiences as a youth growing up as the only African-American family in his Southern California neighborhood—a one-hour car ride away was school that will.i.am attended in the affluence of the then-predominantly white suburbs of Pacific Palisades. His friends were from all over... “and in a way, that’s how I see the animals in ‘Madagascar.’ They live in a zoo and they’re not around any of their natural habitat or others like them.”

The differences of the musicians affected both in differing ways. will.i.am remarks, “I don’t know if I taught him anything, but he taught me stuff, I’ll tell you that. His studio is pretty righteous, and his gear is pretty sick. I’m a geek and I like gear, so there are a couple of ideas I ripped off from how his studio is set up. He was amazing— he was working on our movie the same time he was working on ‘The Dark Knight.’ Unbelievable.”

Years before the African arrival of the New Yorkers, when Alex was a cub, it was a lion named Makunga who had been a contributing factor in the young lion’s first disappearance—Makunga had challenged Zuba, diverting his attention, allowing Alex to wander off. For Makunga, it was a small victory that would pay off down the line—one less competitor for the position of alpha lion. Now that Alex has returned, Makunga is far from thrilled. In fact, he’s determined to see that Alex and his family are ousted for good—which would leave the pride little choice but to acknowledge him as alpha lion. So just who could bring justice to Makunga—a strong, if not vain, male lion, self-important, slick, a schemer and an all-around no-good guy?

Tom McGrath offers, “Alec Baldwin—someone at DreamWorks referred to him as ‘the delicious Alec Baldwin,’ because of his amazing voice, which is just the best, especially for animation. When you listen to him, he’s so rich and he has such a great range. So when this character popped up in the story—Alex’s father’s nemesis—we wanted someone that had this authoritative tone, with a kind of grit to it. But we didn’t want a heavy, heavy character—we wanted someone who could bring some comedy. Alec can deliver the heavy-handed, villain stuff, but he just turns it, creates this edge to the character that’s unique and funny. There’s a relish there. There’s meanness there, but an enjoyment at the center of it.”

On why he became involved, Baldwin states, “Because the first film was so funny. And you see the other people who are connected with the film and you say, ‘Well gosh, if they got those people to do the film, it must be pretty good.’ Jeffrey and everybody at DreamWorks are making the most sophisticated and creative and the best-rendered animated films that can be made today. And when it’s the people from DreamWorks asking, you know it’s gonna be a good project.”

On his character, he muses, “Makunga is another one of those really vain and narrow-minded, self-serving and really pathetic characters. But it makes it all the more fun, I think, when they get the rug pulled out from under them in the end. It’s a kids’ movie, so I don’t think anybody’s really in any danger—I don’t think he’s having people beat up with a pipe. It’s not ‘The Sopranos.’ So I think in a lovable, clever, laugh-a-minute way, he is making the lives of thousands of other people miserable.”

And speaking of miserable people, remember the old lady who beats the living daylight out of Alex in Grand Central Station—the one who swings one mean handbag? Well, guess who happens to be on the first tour SUV that the marooned zoosters encounter? Yup, it’s Nana, again voiced by the nothing-like-her-character Elisa Gabrielli, who winds up face-to-face with Alex.

Producer Mireille Soria: “Elisa was part of the loop group and had a few lines that we used on ‘Madagascar,’ and her old lady just came in and kicked Alex in the batteries, as we say. When we started the second film, it was really Tom who said, ‘What if when the zoosters get to Africa, they see this SUV full of people, and they chase it, which leads them to a cliff that gives them

their first great view of the plains? And what if Nana is on that SUV? We just thought it'd be fun to bring her back, even for a scene or two.”

Creating Africa

What Alex, Marty, Melman and Gloria see when they reach that vista is their first truly inspiring glimpse of the beautiful and expansive African landscape. The filmmakers reasoned that in their previous film, the environment of Madagascar was pretty much a pass to create a fantasy land...but when you start dealing with the real landscapes of one of the most beautiful and photographed countries on the Earth—well, a little realism would have to come into play. They turned to research, looking at films, photography, books and the internet. But a wiser head prevailed.

Eric Darnell: “Jeffrey [Katzenberg] told us that we needed to go there, to see it ourselves. I mean, some of us figured, you know, trees and grass, it probably looks a lot like Simi Valley, right? But when we got there, we realized that nothing looks like it. I never imagined that I'd actually go on an African safari, but it was an amazing experience, and also a great bonding experience for the crew. All the key creative leads went together, and spent several days out there, living in tents on the savanna. To be able to experience this landscape and this place together as a creative team was just absolutely invaluable. Because after we came back, and for the next two or three years, we could say, ‘Remember when we were on the Masai Mara, the sun was going down and there were zebras walking across the grass?’ Everybody remembers and they connect to that, and then we put the important components of that experience into our film. The trip was invaluable.”

Tom McGrath: “When you get to Africa, you realize just how big the place is. I mean, there are grass and trees and plants that look like familiar places, but when you get there, it opens up and it feels like you can actually see the curve of the Earth. And at that point, we realized, ‘Wow, we really need to get the scope to sell Africa in this movie.’ And two-thirds of what you see when you're there is sky. And we just realized that it has to be a huge part of our set...how are we going to do that?”

Producer Mark Swift relates, “The senior leadership on the show visited about five different locations in Africa. When you get to Africa—and so many people have said this—it's a magical place. You get things from it that you never imagine when you see it on television or in the movies. What we all took away with us, visually, was the enormity of the sky. The land is extremely flat, and there are these beautiful volcanoes in the distance. But the skies and the clouds—those became really important elements for us. And then just seeing the sheer amount of animals all mingling with each other also made us realize that we were going to need a huge crowd system worked out for this movie.”

So production concentrated on utilizing the DreamWorks arsenal to create scale, as producer Soria explains: “The big challenge on this movie was the crowds, everywhere we went. Because of where this story takes them, they are meeting herds of zebra, big numbers of hippos, a pride of lions. The concern was that there were a lot of animals of different sizes...and how were we

going to shoot that? So everything was bigger—the sky, the crowds. It ended up being a challenge of scale.”

Kendal Cronkhite, production designer of both the original and “Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa,” was charged with the visual orchestration of all this...scale. In the first film, her designs were more fantastical, simple yet stylized. For the follow-up, the world had to be a bit more tangible, more sophisticated, yet the designer was able to transfer the overall design elements and simplicity already visualized on the screen and ‘Africanize’ them, producing an ‘Africa’ not seen before—rooted in realism but filtered through an animator’s lens. She was able to also incorporate the scope of the environments, particularly the grass, and create an epic quality.

A majority of Cronkhite’s time was devoted to dovetailing a realistically-based Africa with stylized animals. One way for her to do this effectively was to establish a related environment for each character. She elaborates, “Where the plane crashes into the savanna, the directors wanted a real no-man’s-land kind of feel. We return to this set many times, as the penguins are rebuilding the plane with all the chimps, and it turns into a big construction site—the surrounding foliage is really rough and scrubby. Around the watering hole we have distinct areas for the zoosters and their groups. We have the giraffe area, with tall and sweeping and curved acacias—they have this chartreuse colored bark that’s really beautiful. The hippo area uses quiver trees—which are really unusual-looking, like big red wine goblets—and lots of ferns, palms and those kinds of more lush trees, because it’s sort of a spa-like area. It’s on the edge of the waterhole and it’s got little pools divided by rocks.

“And then as you come over to the zebra area,” continues the production designer, “it’s grass, so that they can just run—basically grass, rocks and, ironically, zebra trees, which are another type of acacia. The lion area, it’s a rock kopje, which is a little rock outcrop with boulders of lava rock. The area also has many species of plants, such as umbrella trees, which are a type of cactus shaped like an umbrella.”

The zoosters’ plane hop to a different location also brought more concerns and challenges. The majority of the first film took place in jungles, presenting the characters in front of living walls of flora. Africa is practically an exact opposite—where down go the walls and 100-mile views to the horizon are revealed.

In addition, because of the more personal storylines, the sequel still needed to maintain the fun, broader aspects of the first, but have the ability to change gears and deliver a more subtle, sophisticated style of animation when the subject called for it. The tone was to be fun, but still with a believability of danger.

Returning head of character animation Rex Grignon explains, “We’re not abandoning the style that we established in the first film. It’s a really important part of this world. But what this film gives us is an opportunity to get a little more personal with our characters—when that happens, it’s not really time to be doing big, crazy kinds of stuff. But we don’t want the film to bog down, either. There’s still a lot of great fun and silly stuff in it, but there are moments when we do get in closer—when Alex learns about his past—so there’s some sincere stuff that we want to be real with. But, of course, when the penguins are hijacking an SUV, and there’s a big finale—you’ve

got to have that really fun stuff. We've never lost that. We're just striving for character continuity while allowing them to explore a bit more."

Something that would go very far in filmmakers' effort to maintain the comedy while adding a little emotionality would be the cinematography. As the window between computer animation and computer-generated imagery grows ever smaller, the crossover of talent between the worlds of live-action and animation continues. Guillermo Navarro, Academy Award®-winning cinematographer for "Pan's Labyrinth," signed on for the voyage to Africa with the "Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa" team.

McGrath reasons, "In our first film, we had to lock off shots and it ended up looking somewhat like a series of post cards. We knew we wanted to do a moving camera through a lot of these spaces. A live-action cinematographer would be able to help us develop a more cinematic language for this movie. Mireille Soria brought in Guillermo, and he's fantastic, and he opened our eyes to a lot of things."

Darnell continues, "Everything that you could do with a real camera in the real world, you can do with our virtual cameras: zoom in, zoom out, incorporate different lenses, move the cameras in any way you want. And we can do that even more, because we don't have to pay for a helicopter or an expensive dolly, if that's what we need. And since cinematography was so critical, especially for this movie—with all the scope and the size of the environments, as well as the action—we needed someone with a live action frame of mind."

Navarro began with an "Intro to Cinematography" class for the filmmakers and crew. It commenced with the photographer holding a rolling camera and demonstrating how he finds shots in live-action filmmaking. Then, he began passing the camera around, first to the directors, then others, asking his "students" to find their own shots. The resulting footage was full of moments of discovery—their experience in a loose, free and easy environment became valuable when they moved into the computer, where conditions are more time-consuming and labor intensive.

When the team shifted to flat, 2D storyboards, into which they wanted to introduce a moving camera, Navarro advised them to gather people in a room, set them up with the script, and explore the scene through the camera. Again, worthwhile results, as they discovered how the scenes were (or were not) playing—the participants were also themselves the animators, who now had greater knowledge of the emotional arcs for the characters in those scenes. One such sequence put through this exercise was the argument among the four friends, which escalates as the monkeys' deconstruction of the plane becomes more zealous.

McGrath laughs, "We probably have the high school play version of this entire movie on videotape. Those exercises of actual filming and solving problems on the fly actually impacted how we eventually made our film."

The "animators as actors" idea was taken even further, when they were immersed in several days of workshops in order to challenge themselves as artists. Characters were dissected through discussion and questioning—resembling the preparation an actor might go through in exploring

the backstory on a character he was to portray. Then, prior to executing a shot, the animator might act out the scene multiple times with variations, each time playing the character in the shot. This allowed a more in-depth look into the characters themselves, to get at more of the emotions the filmmakers were so keen to discover, giving the animators keys to more subtle expression of both surface reactions and subtext.

Supervising animator Cassidy Curtis even expressed, “I worked on almost all of the characters, and some of the new ones are really fun to explore. Tom and Eric are so receptive to the ideas that we bring to them, and the communications process has been a two-way street and very collaborative. To watch the animators get up in front of the directors with a new idea for something, and to see them try it out and have the directors say, ‘Yeah, that’s pretty funny, let’s try it’—and then to see the expression on the animators’ faces when they come out of dailies, having seen their idea realized—it’s just great and a really satisfying way to work.”

To fully coordinate the efforts of hundreds of film artisans, DreamWorks again employed the HP-designed technology that links their two California campuses—one in Glendale (southern) and PDI in Redwood City (northern)—the Virtual Studio Collaboration system (VSC). Such a hook-up puts DreamWorkers in the same room, essentially, with 30-foot-square video walls. This technology proved especially useful to producer Mireille Soria, whose husband and family keep her rooted in Southern California. Having jumped at the chance to return as producer on the sequel, her traveling was significantly curtailed up to Redwood City (where the majority of the crew was working), thanks to the video conferencing that kept all departments on the same page and up-to-speed.

Making The Movie Even More Effect-ive

Returning visual effects supervisor Philippe Gluckman thought that the effects in the first film had been difficult to achieve...until he realized the challenges that lay ahead for him in “Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa.”

Gluckman explains, “To create all the jungle in the first one, with the density of plants—at the time, it was a big achievement, particularly since it was jungle plus crowds and things like fur. But in some ways the jungle before—even though there were a lot of plants—it would mask the view after a certain point and, therefore, you didn’t have to produce as many plants just because they would be obscured. But the landscapes in this film, because it’s so much more open that you see basically all the way to the horizon, the element that probably becomes the most complex is actually the grass. You see grass all the way to the horizon. You also see crowds going all the way into the distance. And the grass is very difficult, because basically, the computer has to generate every single blade of grass...and that becomes just a lot of data to handle.”

As a result of the African trip, Gluckman also realized that not only would the expansive sky prove problematic, so, too, would the clouds that sometimes dot and, at other times, overwhelm the space. He particularly found the way the clouds were lit to be fascinating—“there’s an element of unpredictability to it all.”

To help replicate this unpredictable Mother Nature and her mercurial way of playing with light and clouds, proprietary software was created that could produce the clouds themselves as 3D elements, which then allowed the computers to light them—as difficult and as memory-consuming a task as it was.

He continues, “We pushed the limits of technology, trying to get the light to shine through the cloud to get a unique translucent behavior. This brought us some really amazing images that either were used directly, where the clouds are actually 3D elements, or were used as the basis for the painters to start with. And it gave us looks that were really fascinating.”

Darnell comments, “Think of it as being inside of a globe with painted clouds that surround you. But we decided to make these three-dimensional clouds, which are much more computationally expensive and technically challenging. But to really give us the sense of scale and size, and to see these rolling shapes playing against each other in perspective—well, that is something that’s very difficult to do with a painting or a backdrop. And these three-dimensional clouds gave us the opportunity to really bring the sky to life, while giving it the same kind of scope and scale and perspective that we were getting on our landscapes in Africa.”

But to incorporate those clouds into the frames, and have them actually support the composition of the frame, the job fell to the matte painters. McGrath says, “We have this crew of incredibly talented matte painters who come in and create these skies for us, which can move and reflect light as well. And since two-thirds of our screen in much of the movie is domed with this sky, we really relied heavily on the matte painters to support the sets we built and the compositions of the frame.”

Into those frames, other challenges would wander—like thousands of animals—and others would simply be there—like moving water or, perhaps even more problematically, a billion blades of grass. This three-foot grass does more than just cover the savanna, it also has to ‘act’—compact under hooves and footfalls, part when animals are passing. Again, technology to the rescue, with another system to grow and individually control these blades of grass. This sort of advancement made the original film seem light years ago, as the characters of “Madagascar” couldn’t pick up an object or touch their hair in the beginning of the first film. DreamWorks computer artisans kept pushing the possibilities and advancing—the characters had moving hair and when they fell on the ground, the hair could compress.

Head of effects Scott Peterson offers, “We do a lot with the grass. Where it’s trickiest is actually where the grass meets up with the characters. We had to put animation into the grass, so that if a character is stepping on it, the grass is reacting properly, and we found out that making the grass collide properly actually doesn’t look very good. So we have to embellish it with lots of almost very directed wind—this gives it a secondary motion.”

Such careful effects treatment of things like grass, foliage animation and dust is called an invisible effect—invisible in the sense that it should organically fit into the scene without pulling attention. Countless hours are spent attempting to make such animation real and integral to the scene.

Something else that has to be carefully engineered is crowd control, which would become especially important to all of the herds of animals at play on the African savanna. Darnell says, “As soon as you put a hundred different characters into a shot, you have to find a way to make it feel organic. If you have a little cycle of a character waving, ‘Yay!’ it’s easy. But if that shot lasts too long, you start to see it repeat. And if you haven’t done enough variations of that, pretty soon this guy’s doing this, and then three guys over, he’s doing the same thing. Your eye can easily pick up these patterns. And so it’s a real challenge, both creatively and technically, to animate these big populations in a way that feels natural and organic. But even more difficult for us sometimes is getting our characters to pop off of these big masses of animals. You know, zebras are designed with black and white stripes for a very specific reason—that’s so when they’re running in a herd, you can’t pick out one from the other. So being able to pick Marty out—sometimes we’d put him in a little more light, or darken the other zebras with dust or dirt, or drop them out of focus a little bit. We ended up creating the same challenges for ourselves that Mother Nature intentionally creates—we drop our lions into the very authentic African savanna, and suddenly, where’d they go? You can’t find him, because he does what he’s supposed to do, which is blend in with this grass so the prey can’t see him. So we had to do things to bring up the color of our lions and knock back the color of the grasses so that we could defy Mother Nature and actually see our characters onscreen.”

Such involved work to capture all the detail and movement gave “Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa” an unintended record over the preceding film. It took 12 million render hours to complete “Madagascar,” while the follow-up would require close to 30 million to complete.

Well, At Least It Was A Non-Stop Flight

The process for developing a great comedy action sequence doesn’t happen overnight—it is an add-to and take-away process that can last months...swapping around cinematography, various lines of dialogue and other variables. But no matter how many filmmaker hours are spent trying to fashion a great sequence, that wished-for magic will never materialize unless the idea that originated it all is a good one...like a plane piloted by penguins that remains briefly aloft, only to plummet to the African continent in short order.

Tom McGrath tells, “One night, I just had this brain fever, so I roughly boarded up this idea on how this plane crash sequence could play out. It was really broad strokes. But all the time that we were developing it, we kept going back to those boards.” Eric Darnell adds, “It’s a testament to Tom’s talent that the sequence ended up pretty much exactly the way that he boarded it that night.”

That group process Mireille Soria referred to as “the Knights of the Roundtable, when everyone gathered together to get and give input...from the very beginning, that is how we went about solving any problems that came up.”

Filmmakers weren’t too proud to use any tool or suggestion when it came time to create or improve on the already created—the crash sequence being a sterling example. They utilized Navarro’s technique of plotting through camera by strapping animators and layout artists in an upside-down couch and filming them with a shaking camera, looking at possible angles and

movements. Visual effects added realism through details such as blowing curtains, wind whipping through the manes and pieces of the plane being peeled away, like a space capsule on re-entry into the Earth's atmosphere.

The ultimate goal was to tweak this plane wreck of comedic proportions up to a level 10: the plane gathers velocity as it spins out of control, a plume of smoke emitted in a perfect corkscrew; the camera shakes as it captures the various reactions of the passengers; flames are visible through the windows as the aircraft barrels through the sky; the light inside the plane rolls around as the fuselage itself rolls toward the earth. Darnell observes, "You feel like you've been in this plane crash with these guys. And yet it's also entertaining and funny, because it's driven by the characters, along with these great, solid comedic action concepts that were part of the genesis of the idea in Tom's thumbnail sketches."

Scott Peterson sums up, "So in any shot in the plane crash sequence, we could have anywhere from 15 to 30 effects elements. We might spend about six weeks working on one shot, which could be only a couple of seconds long. At the risk of understating the obvious, plane crash shots are very involved."

For the filmmakers who committed several years of their lives to completing "Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa," each had his/her own goals to achieve within the film, yet all were devoted to the tale of the zoosters' continued attempts to get back to their Central Park home.

Mark Swift feels, "Each character grows in this film. For Alex, it's about finding out how he can be himself as a lion in Africa. For the other characters, it's their storylines as they meet their own kind. Marty, for the first time, is getting to run with a herd, something he's always dreamed about...but how does that really sit with him once he meets all the zebras? For Gloria, it's time to start a relationship, maybe a love interest, so this is her first time actually meeting male hippos. And Melman's story really is one of discovery—that he's actually in love with Gloria and has been all along."

Mireille Soria somewhat personally reflects, "They'll always be New Yorkers. They are New Yorkers at heart. It's where they're from. It's where they will ultimately get back to. There was a big debate for us—do they stay in Africa? Or do they go back? Alex has a family now, and I have a family. Even though my kids are older, I don't want them to leave home ever. Yet, that's the goal—to raise independent kids—so we are walking that line of Alex's parents being able to acknowledge that his path may be away from them, but that doesn't mean that they are separated as a family, per se. And that doesn't mean that they don't love each other. So it's kind of a challenge, because a lot of our audience, to be honest, won't get that—the kids. But the parents will...boy, will they get that."

Tom McGrath thinks, "This movie is bigger, better, more fun, but it also has a story that people can relate to a little bit better, I think. Audiences should find themselves in situations that they can identify with—maybe not a spiraling plane, but parental issues, identity issues, love. I mean, we still want people to laugh—that's our main goal—but we also want to move them a little. And we feel like this film just has a prime opportunity to tell a great story and to move audiences more than the first."

CAST

BEN STILLER (Alex) is a prolific actor, director, producer and writer who continues to imprint his unique perspective on film, television and stage.

Stiller was recently seen starring opposite Robert Downey, Jr. and Jack Black in “Tropic Thunder,” an action comedy about a group of self-absorbed actors who set out to make the biggest war film ever. Stiller also co-wrote, directed and produced the film through his Red Hour Films production banner.

Stiller recently completed production on “Night at the Museum 2: Battle of the Smithsonian,” the follow up to the 2006 blockbuster “Night at the Museum.” Amy Adams, Christopher Guest, Hank Azaria and Bill Hader join the all-star returning cast including Robin Williams, Dick Van Dyke, Owen Wilson and Ricky Gervais, to bring to life the Smithsonian Institution, which houses the world's largest museum complex. “Museum” is slated for release May 22, 2009.

Stiller most recently signed on to star opposite Reese Witherspoon in Cameron Crowe's “Untitled Project,” which will begin production in early 2009.

Stiller has been directing, acting and producing films consistently over the last decade, including “Reality Bites,” his motion picture directorial debut in 1994, “The Cable Guy” starring Jim Carrey, which he directed in 1996, and “Zoolander,” which he co-wrote, directed and produced in 2001 through Red Hour Films, along with producing partner Stuart Cornfeld. He has also starred in numerous hits, including “Flirting with Disaster” written and directed by David O. Russell, “Meet the Parents” and its sequel “Meet the Fockers,” “There’s Something About Mary,” “Dodgeball: A True Underdog Story,” “Starsky & Hutch” and the animated hit “Madagascar,” as well as the box office blockbuster “Night at the Museum” for 20th Century Fox, which grossed nearly \$600 million worldwide. In 1998, Stiller portrayed Jerry Stahl in “Permanent Midnight,” the true-life story of a heroin-addicted comedy writer. That same year, he also appeared in “Your Friends and Neighbors” written and directed by Neil LaBute.

Producer credits include “Zoolander,” “Starsky & Hutch,” “Dodgeball: A True Underdog Story,” “The Ruins” and the smash hit “Blades of Glory” starring Will Ferrell. Stiller earned an Emmy Award for his writing on the critically acclaimed television series “The Ben Stiller Show,” which lasted all of 12 episodes. He also appeared on Broadway in the Tony Award-winning production of “The House of Blue Leaves” by John Guare, and off-Broadway in Neil LaBute’s “This is How it Goes” directed by George C. Wolfe.

Lauded by awards and critics alike, **CHRIS ROCK** (Marty) is one of our generation’s strongest comedic voices. Rock kicked off his first stand-up tour in over three years – “No Apologies” – with a New Year’s Eve date at New York City’s Madison Square Garden. Featuring all new material, Rock then headed to the United Kingdom, where he performed for his first time ever overseas. He immediately sold out his original set of 2008 UK tour dates, and to satiate the fervent demand, an additional week-long overseas leg was added. Rock’s tour returned to the United States in early February, where it lasted through May, with additional international dates following in Australia, South Africa and Europe, before returning to the US throughout the

summer. On May 23, Rock broke the Guinness World Record for the largest audience ever at a comedy show in the UK, by selling out the O2 Arena on two consecutive nights with an audience of 15,900 each night.

Coinciding with the tour, Rock also released his first “best-of” album, “Cheese and Crackers: The Greatest Bits,” through Geffen Records. Featuring 19 tracks of Rock’s most notorious moments, “Cheese and Crackers” showcases the Brooklyn-raised comic’s insight on everything from race relations and politics to sex and the infamous “N-word.”

Rock was honored with HBO’s esteemed “Comedian Award” at the 2006 Las Vegas Comedy Festival. The Brooklyn-raised comedian has garnered three Emmy Awards and three Grammy Awards and has seen his former eponymous talk show become one of HBO’s highest-rated and most talked-about programs.

Currently serving as both co-creator and narrator of the acclaimed hit television series “Everybody Hates Chris,” now on the CW network, Rock has also appeared as a guidance counselor in the Rock-inspired sitcom about a black kid in a mostly white school in 1980s Brooklyn, which debuted on UPN in 2005. Since then, it has been named one of Entertainment Weekly’s “Top New Series,” making it the most-watched comedy in UPN’s history. In 2006 the show earned both a Golden Globe nomination for Best Television Series Musical or Comedy and a Writers Guild Award nomination for Best New Series.

Rock was most recently heard voicing Mooseblood the mosquito in Jerry Seinfeld’s animated “Bee Movie,” which also starred Renée Zellweger and Matthew Broderick. In March of 2007, Rock starred in “I Think I Love My Wife,” a film which he also wrote and directed. Rock made his directorial debut with “Head of State,” which opened Number One at the box office. He starred as an unlikely Washington, D.C. alderman chosen to be a presidential nominee, while Bernie Mac portrayed his older brother who becomes his running mate. He also starred in both “The Longest Yard” with Adam Sandler, a remake of the 1974 classic, as well as in the box office animated hit “Madagascar,” featuring the voices of Ben Stiller, Sacha Baron Cohen, Andy Richter, Jada Pinkett Smith and David Schwimmer.

Rock’s feature film debut was in “Beverly Hills Cop II” with Eddie Murphy. He went on to write, create, star in and produce the rap comedy “CB4” in 1993, a satire of the world of hardcore rap, which opened Number One at the box office. Other film credits include “Boomerang” with Eddie Murphy; “Panther,” a drama spotlighting the lives of the 60s activist group The Black Panthers, directed by Mario Van Peebles; “New Jack City” with Wesley Snipes (a film marking Rock’s dramatic debut as a desperate crack addict); and “I’m Gonna Git You Sucka!” with Keenen Ivory Wayans. The summer of 1998 saw Rock co-star in two \$100-million-plus grossing films: “Lethal Weapon IV” and “Dr. Dolittle.” Rock starred in Kevin Smith’s “Dogma,” which also featured Ben Affleck, Salma Hayek and Matt Damon. He also starred in the Jerry Bruckheimer-produced “Bad Company,” opposite Anthony Hopkins; the romantic comedy “Down to Earth,” co-directed by Paul and Chris Weitz and co-written by Rock; and the dark comedy “Nurse Betty,” directed by Neil LaBute, in which Rock co-starred with Morgan Freeman and Renée Zellweger.

After gaining early success as a stand-up comedian, Rock joined the cast of NBC's "Saturday Night Live" in 1989. In 1993, he taped his first HBO special "Chris Rock: Big Ass Jokes," which was honored with a CableAce Award. Rock served as the sole 1996 presidential campaign correspondent for the acclaimed "Politically Incorrect," then on Comedy Central, and received an Emmy nomination for a shared writing credit in the category of Outstanding Writing for a Variety or Music Program for the show.

Rock's true emergence as a celebrated talent can be traced to his next HBO special, "Bring the Pain," which was honored with two Emmy Awards for Best Writing and Outstanding Special in 1997. "Bring the Pain" was released as a home video, as well as a Grammy Award-winning CD. Rock went on to host the acclaimed "Chris Rock Show," which began airing on HBO in 1997. Rock and his popular talk show were honored with several Emmy nominations for both writing and best host. The show then received an Emmy Award for Best Writing in 1999.

His next HBO stand-up special, "Bigger & Blacker," taped on the stage of Harlem's fabled Apollo Theatre, earned three Emmy nominations for Rock, while the CD went on to win the Grammy Award for Best Spoken or Comedy Album. Rock's most recent HBO special, "Never Scared," aired in April, 2004, was nominated for two Emmys, its CD also earning the Grammy for Best Comedy Album. In 2003, Rock embarked on his North American stand-up tour, entitled the "Black Ambition Tour" that ran in 64 cities with over 80 shows through March of 2004.

Rock hosted the "77th Annual Academy Awards" in 2005, as well as the "MTV Video Music Awards" in 1999 and 2003. Rock's debut book, *Rock This*, spent time on both The New York Times and the Wall Street Journal bestseller lists.

DAVID SCHWIMMER (Melman) recently directed "Little Britain USA" for HBO and acted in the film "Nothing But The Truth" for Rod Lurie. He is the co-founder of Chicago's Lookingglass Theatre Company, where he has acted in and directed many productions including "The Master and Margarita," "West," "Eye of the Beholder," "The Odyssey," "The Idiot," and his adaptations of Studs Terkel's book "Race" and Upton Sinclair's "The Jungle." He starred in the premieres of Roger Kumble's "D Girl" and "Turnaround," Warren Leight's "Glimmer Brothers" in Williamstown, and Neil LaBute's "Some Girl(s)" in London as well as "The Caine Mutiny Court Martial" on Broadway.

Notable television and film credits include "Madagascar," "Duane Hopwood," "Big Nothing," "Band of Brothers," "Curb Your Enthusiasm," "Six Days Seven Nights," "Apt Pupil," "Kissing a Fool," "The Pallbearer," and the hit comedy series "Friends," for which he received an Emmy Award nomination for Outstanding Supporting Actor. His film directing debut was the UK hit comedy "Run, Fat Boy, Run" starring Simon Pegg, Thandie Newton and Hank Azaria.

JADA PINKETT SMITH (Gloria) has proven herself to be one of today's most versatile and talented stars both on and off screen. Jada was most recently seen on the big screen opposite Meg Ryan and Eva Mendes in the long-awaited remake of "The Women" from writer-director Diane English.

As an actress, Pinkett Smith has amassed an impressive list of film credits, including a recent teaming with box office superstars Adam Sandler and Don Cheadle in “Reign Over Me” for Columbia Pictures, as well as a pivotal role opposite Tom Cruise and Academy Award® winner Jamie Foxx in Michael Mann’s “Collateral.” She is perhaps best known as the take-charge Niobe in the hugely successful sequels “Matrix Reloaded” and “Matrix Revolutions.”

Just as she does on screen, Pinkett Smith continually challenges herself off screen with new and exciting projects. “The Human Contract” is one of several projects being produced through her production company, 100% Woman. Not only does she co-star with leads Jason Clarke and Paz Vega, but she also directed the film and wrote the screenplay. Pinkett Smith’s previous effort at putting pen to paper resulted in the New York Times bestseller *Girls Hold Up This World*, published in 2005.

As producers, Pinkett Smith and husband Will Smith were the creators and executive producers of the CW Network’s “All of Us.” They are currently in development on several television and film projects slated for production in 2009. A native of Maryland, Pinkett Smith studied dance and acting at the Baltimore School of Arts and the North Carolina School of the Arts. Her big break came when she landed a role on the long-running NBC series “A Different World.”

SACHA BARON COHEN (King Julien) was, until recently, best known to the public as his alter ego Ali G, the in-your-face host of HBO’s popular multiple Emmy Award- nominated comedy variety/talk show “Da Ali G Show.” The show was already the Number One comedy phenomenon in Baron Cohen’s native England when he brought it to the United States, where it became an instant sensation on HBO. After completing two seasons, Baron Cohen set out to conquer the world with “Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan,” a feature film starring his second alter ego, Borat Sagdiyev, a Kazakhstani news reporter. Baron Cohen is now known worldwide for creating “one of the greatest comedies of the last decade and perhaps even a whole new genre of film” (Neil Strauss of Rolling Stone magazine). After opening Number One in 24 countries, grossing over \$250 million worldwide and taking home the Golden Globe for Best Actor in a Comedy/Musical, as well as an Academy Award® nomination for Best Adapted Screenplay, it’s safe to say that we have yet to see the best of Baron Cohen.

Since its release in November 2006, “Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan” has garnered numerous awards and nominations, including being named one of the 10 Most Outstanding Motion Pictures of the Year by AFI and a Golden Globe nomination for Best Picture, Comedy/Musical. Individually, Baron Cohen won the Los Angeles Film Critics Association Award for Best Actor, the San Francisco Film Critics Circle Award for Best Actor, Toronto Film Critics Association Award for Best Actor and a Golden Globe for Best Actor in a Comedy/Musical.

The HBO show has received six Emmy Award nominations, including two in 2003 for Outstanding Non-Fiction Program and Outstanding Writing, Non-Fiction Program and three in 2005 for Outstanding Variety, Music or Comedy Series; Outstanding Writing, Variety, Music or Comedy Series; and Outstanding Directing, Variety, Music or Comedy Series. The show also

received many accolades in the UK prior to its stateside debut, with Baron Cohen garnering two BAFTA Awards (Best Comedy Performance and Best Comedy Programme).

Baron Cohen originated the character of Ali G in 1998 on the British television comedy “The 11 O’Clock Show.” Two years later, Channel 4 Television launched “Da Ali G. Show,” which quickly gained a cult following that grew as word-of-mouth spread all the way to Buckingham Palace, since the Queen of England is an acknowledged devotee of the series. Baron Cohen serves as an executive producer on the series, in addition to acting and writing for it. In 2003, HBO began airing “Da Ali G. Show” in the United States.

Baron Cohen’s past film projects include the hit feature comedy “Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby” with co-stars Will Ferrell and John C. Reilly, and voicing King Julien in the DreamWorks animated feature “Madagascar,” which grossed over \$500 million worldwide. Most recently, he was seen in Tim Burton’s Oscar®- winning “Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street,” starring alongside Johnny Depp and Helena Bonham Carter.

Baron Cohen has twice hosted the MTV Europe Music Awards, first as the character of Ali G in November, 2001, in Frankfurt, Germany; and then as Borat in November, 2005, in Lisbon, Portugal.

CEDRIC THE ENTERTAINER (Maurice) is best known for his crowd pleasing roles in such hit films as “Barbershop,” “Be Cool” with John Travolta, “Madagascar,” “Intolerable Cruelty” with George Clooney and “The Original Kings of Comedy,” MTV’s documentary feature directed by Spike Lee. In April 2004, Cedric starred in and produced the box office hit “Johnson Family Vacation,” which was ranked as the #1 comedy in America for two consecutive weeks.

On the big screen, Cedric has also been seen in “Street Kings” opposite Keanu Reeves; “Welcome Home, Roscoe Jenkins” with Martin Lawrence; “Talk To Me” starring Don Cheadle; “Codename: The Cleaner” opposite Lucy Liu; “The Honeymooners,” in which he starred as Jackie Gleason’s famed character Ralph Cramden and received thumbs up from Roger Ebert; “Lemony Snicket’s A Series of Unfortunate Events” with Jim Carrey; “Man of the House” with Tommy Lee Jones; “Barbershop 2”; “Big Momma’s House,”; “Kingdom Come” with Whoopi Goldberg; and “Serving Sara” with Matthew Perry. He also displayed tremendous vocal talent in the family features “Charlotte’s Web,” “Dr. Dolittle 2” and “Ice Age.” In July 2006, Cedric debuted his first-ever HBO Comedy Special, the highest rated special of that year for HBO.

Upcoming appearances include “Cadillac Records” with Adrien Brody and Beyoncé Knowles, “Johnson Family Vacation 2” and “Flash,” co-starring rapper Nelly. Cedric has celebrated many career successes spanning television, live performances and film. Some of his notable accolades include nabbing the AFTRA Award of Excellence in Television Programming for his Fox Television series “Cedric The Entertainer Presents” and a record-breaking four consecutive NAACP Image Awards for Outstanding Supporting Actor in a Comedy Series for his portrayal of the lovable Coach Cedric Robinson on the WB’s #1-rated “The Steve Harvey Show,” which ran for six seasons. His first comedy book, Grown-Ass Man, was released in January 2002 and sold out across the country. In 2001, a viewing audience of over 144 million saw Cedric star in the Bud Light commercial that landed in the #1 spot during the Super Bowl broadcast, for which

he was subsequently dubbed by USA Today as “Madison Avenue’s Most Valuable Player.” In 1994, Cedric received the Richard Pryor Comic of the Year Award from Black Entertainment Television for his groundbreaking work as host of “Def Comedy Jam” and BET’s “Comic View” (1994-95 season).

Now helming his own production company, A Bird and A Bear Entertainment, Cedric will develop and produce feature films. “Johnson Family Vacation” was the first feature under the new company.

As a philanthropist, Cedric founded the Cedric The Entertainer Charitable Foundation, which provides scholarships and outreach programs to enhance the lives of inner-city youth and their families in his hometown of St. Louis, Missouri. He plans to extend the foundation nationally.

Actor and writer **ANDY RICHTER** (Mort) rose to fame while having the best seat in the house on NBC’s “Late Night with Conan O’Brien” as O’Brien’s sidekick for seven years, beginning with its premiere on September 13, 1993.

Richter and the “Late Night” writing team were nominated yearly for the Emmy Award for Best Writing in a comedy or Variety Series and won the 1997 Writers Guild Award for Best Writing. Richter has made quite a leap off of the late night couch since his departure from the show in 2000.

Re-teaming with co-creator and producer Conan O’Brien in 2007, Richter returned to the small screen in the comedy “Andy Barker, P.I.” Andy Barker, an earnest, hard-working CPA, is mistaken for a retired private investigator when he takes over his vacated office space. Embracing the twist of fate, the modest, gentle-minded accountant dives into his double life with the help of his strip-mall neighbors (Tony Hale from “Arrested Development” and Marshall Manesh from “Will & Grace”).

In 2002, Richter starred in and produced the FOX comedy “Andy Richter Controls the Universe,” in which he portrayed a struggling writer with an overactive imagination. That year, it was named “the funniest new comedy of the spring” by TIME and garnered an Emmy nomination for writing. In 2004, Richter returned to television, and to FOX, on its newest hit comedy “Quintuplets,” playing the father of teenage quintuplets. He has also had memorable cameo roles in such popular series as “Arrested Development,” “Monk,” and – in a hysterical three-episode arc as Christine’s unlikely secret affair – on the critically acclaimed series “The New Adventures of Old Christine.”

Richter continues to be very active in the feature film world as well as television.

He was most recently seen in the Will Ferrell basketball comedy “Semi-Pro.”

Other feature film credits include “Blades of Glory”; “Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby” with Will Ferrell, Amy Adams, Sacha Baron Cohen and John C. Reilly; “If I Had Known I Was A Genius”; “Seeing Other People”; “New York Minute” with Mary-Kate and

Ashley Olsen; “Elf,” again with Ferrell, “Dr. T and the Women”; “Scary Movie 2”; and the animated feature “Madagascar” alongside Ben Stiller, Chris Rock and Jada Pinkett Smith.

Richter attended the University of Illinois Urbana/Champaign and Columbia College, where he studied film and video. He currently lives in Los Angeles with his wife and two children.

CREW

ERIC DARNELL (Director / Screenplay) wrote and directed the 2005 worldwide DreamWorks Animation SKG blockbuster “Madagascar.” He also previously directed the studio’s first computer-animated feature film, “Antz.”

Darnell joined PDI/DreamWorks, the studio’s northern California campus, in 1991, where he helmed numerous commercial and film projects, drawing upon his multifaceted talents in animation, visual effects and art direction. His in-house animated short entitled “Gas Planet” garnered international recognition, including the Ottawa Animation Festival Special Jury Prize.

Also for DreamWorks, Darnell assisted with computer animation research and development for the studio’s first traditionally animated feature, “The Prince of Egypt.” Darnell earned a BA in broadcast journalism from the University of Colorado and an MFA in experimental animation from CalArts. While completing his MFA, he was awarded filmmaking grants from both the Ahmanson Foundation and the Princess Grace Foundation.

Prior to joining DreamWorks Animation SKG, Darnell worked as a freelance animator. His credits include directing the animated music video “Get Up” for the rock band R.E.M.

TOM MCGRATH (Director / Screenplay / Skipper) has been working in the field of entertainment for more than 18 years. In addition to making his feature film directorial debut with the global hit “Madagascar” (on which he also served as writer), he also showcased his acting talents on the film, voicing the lead penguin, Skipper.

Following the runaway success of “Madagascar” (and while working on its sequel) McGrath also voiced Skipper for the short “The Madagascar Penguins in: The Christmas Caper” and provided voices for “Flushed Away” and “Shrek the Third.”

McGrath previously worked in the areas of story and concept design for such features as “Cats & Dogs” and “How the Grinch Stole Christmas.” He also worked as an animator and story artist on such animated films as “Space Jam” and “Cool World.” His television work includes directing on “The Ren & Stimpy Show,” as well as other projects for Nickelodeon. In addition, McGrath has worked on the shorts “Herd” and “The Thing What Lurked in the Tub,” and as a directing animator on national commercials for Coors Light and Subaru.

McGrath graduated from the Character Animation program at Cal Arts after studying Industrial Design at the University of Washington.

