



Cool new shows!

by lana castleman

Stella Takes the Stage

Co-producers: New York's Little Airplane Productions and Toronto-based Spin Master Entertainment

Style: Theater arts animation

Format: 52 x 11 minutes

Demo: Three to five

Budget: between US\$375,000 and US\$400,000/half hour

Status: In early development. The co-producers are in the process of hashing out storylines, character design and a bible.

Delivery: 2011

Concept: This unique preschool series marks new territory for its creator Josh Selig, president of Little Airplane. It's the company's first-ever co-production and just the second for toyco offshoot Spin Master Entertainment. And in keeping with the pioneering theme, Selig's planning on crafting a new style of animation to execute the adventures of charismatic, gutsy six-year-old Stella as she turns to the stage to share her experiences and tales of personal triumph with kid viewers. After the bouncy Klezmer-style theme song intros each episode, Stella takes her stage to tell viewers about a very big event she's got planned that day, which could be anything from taking a trip to a bagel factory to trying out for the T-ball team. The curtain on the set stage lifts and the scene unfolds against stylized, two-dimensional theatrical backgrounds. Stella and the other characters, meanwhile, will be rendered in a more realistic 3-D style. While participating in the on-stage action, Stella also plays the role of stage manager à la *Our Town*, integrating narration into the show's overall narrative—also something of a new approach for preschool TV. As for the animation, Selig intends to use the conventions of stagecraft—including set changes, theatrical lighting and scrim—that reference historical productions for a fluid telling of Stella's stories. For example, if there's an episode about bird watching, its sets might be influenced by *Swan Lake* and they'll appear seamlessly behind Stella as she begins to relate her adventure. Underpinning the series is a curriculum that emphasizes the importance of self-knowledge aimed at helping kids figure out what skills and qualities they possess and how they want to use them. Production will be carried out entirely at Little Airplane's New York studio and both partners are equally involved in development. Given Spin Master's toy connection, a consumer products program is on the table. But SM executive producers Matt Wexler and Jennifer Picherack say it will be addressed after the creative and artistic direction of the series is entirely set.