

MARKING TIME

PRODUCER ELLEN GOLDSMITH-VEIN SHARES HER INSIGHTS ON THE MAKING OF THE UPCOMING *WENDELL & WILD*, WHICH EARNED HER THE PRODUCERS MARK, AND “THE IMMERSIVE AND MAGICAL EXPERIENCE THAT ANIMATION PROVIDES FOR A VIEWER.”

Wendell & Wild
Ellen Goldsmith-Vein, p.g.a.

Ellen Goldsmith-Vein, the founder and CEO of The Gotham Group—a management/production company based in Los Angeles—might be best known as the producer of *The Maze Runner* trilogy, a series of sci-fi action/adventure films that collectively have grossed almost a billion dollars worldwide. But her animation roots run deep, dating back to a time “when no one gave animation talent a second thought,” as she puts it. The upcoming *Wendell & Wild* (being released in October via Netflix), which she produced with Jordan Peele and writer-director Henry Selick, continues a fruitful association with animation that began with the TV series *Creature Comforts*, which aired from 2003-06. *Wendell & Wild* has been described as “a dark horror fantasy.” She’s currently in production on *My Best Friend’s Exorcism*, based on the novel of the same name by Grady Hendrix, for Amazon Studios, as well as the animated series *The Search for*

WondLa for Apple TV+, based on the sci-fi fantasy series of books by Tony DiTerlizzi.

YOUR FIRST PRODUCING CREDIT, AS AN EXECUTIVE PRODUCER ON THE ANIMATED SERIES *CREATURE COMFORTS*, WAS ALSO STOP-MOTION. WOULD YOU CONSIDER *WENDELL & WILD* A FULL-CIRCLE RETURN TO YOUR ORIGINS?

Stop-motion has always been one of my favorite animation styles because of the handmade quality of the work. It’s incredibly hard to make an animated film or television series, and the artists that work in this unique discipline are in high demand. Alongside Netflix and with Henry Selick as the visionary leader on *Wendell & Wild*, we’ve been able to assemble the best of the best in every department to make this movie. Henry always tries new things on his movies, things that have not been done before, so he is creating while he is creating. To see the artistic and technological advances that have been developed in both instances has been revelatory.



HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED WITH *WENDELL & WILD*?

We’ve worked with Henry Selick for over 20 years. His auteur status was always apparent, and it’s been a highlight of my career to encourage and support his cinematic vision. His idea for *Wendell & Wild* was, like Henry himself, a true original with the potential to attract a wide audience. That’s exactly the type of project that we as a company champion. When Jordan Peele came on board as a producer, co-writer, and star alongside Keegan Michael Key, Lyric Ross and Angela Bassett, among others, it seemed this idea had reached its fullest expression. We brought the concept to Netflix, which saw his film as the perfect debut project for a creative partnership with Henry.

HENRY SELICK HAS DIRECTED TWO OF THE MORE NOTABLE

STOP-MOTION FILMS EVER MADE: *THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS* AND *CORALINE*. CAN YOU SPEAK TO HIS SPECIFIC WAY OF WORKING? AND HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM?

Henry and I have known each other and worked together for so long, we understand each other pretty well at this point. I know that he appreciates collaboration and working hand in hand with his crew to bring the best version of a story to life. I thought I knew everything about animation, but with Henry, there is always something unique and original. To see the true creative spark and then see it come to life in this magical format is pretty special.

IT'S BEEN WRITTEN THAT PRODUCTION WAS DONE REMOTELY DURING COVID IN JUNE 2020, AND THAT MUCH OF IT WAS DONE IN PORTLAND, OREGON, WHERE NEARBY WILDFIRES WERE RAGING, AND POLITICAL UNREST CONTINUED IN THE WAKE OF THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION AND BLM PROTESTS. WHY OREGON?

In recent years, the Portland, Oregon, area has developed into a stop-motion hub, so it was great to tap into that substantial creative pool for *Wendell & Wild*. Henry was one of the reasons that so much animation talent moved to Portland in the first place, as his film *Coraline* was made at the then-burgeoning LAIKA Studios. There are only a handful of locations on the planet where stop-motion thrives. Besides Portland, the only other one I can think of is Bristol, England, which has been the longtime home of Aardman Animations (which worked on *Creature Comforts*). Portland and Bristol are similar from many perspectives, and most importantly, they are two cities that attract the largest pool of stop-motion animators. ■



Ellen Goldsmith-Vein

Certification via the Producers Mark indicates that a producer performed a major portion of the producing functions on a specific project. Criteria, its definition, the process for earning the mark and other particulars can be viewed at producersguild.org.