



**CARTOON SALOON AT 25**

# The Secret of Kells

## **The Secret of Kells**

*Director:* Tomm Moore

*Co-director:* Nora Twomey

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*A Co-production:* Les Armateurs, Vivi Film, Cartoon Saloon, France 2 Cinéma

*In association with:* Sofica Soficinéma 2

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*Production Companies:* Canal+, Ciné-Cinemas,

Bord Scannán na hÉireann, Promimage, Wallimage,

Conseil Général de la Charente, Eurimages Conseil

de l'Europe, Media Plus, i2i

*International Sales:* Celluloïd Dreams

*Executive Producers:* Ivan Rouveure,

Viviane Vanfleteren, James Flynn

*Producers:* Didier Brunner, Viviane Vanfleteren,

Paul Young

*Co-producer:* Tomm Moore

*Line Producer:* Katia Besimensky

*Delegate Producers:* Ferenc Mikulás

*Head of Development:* Mireille Ciment

*Production Manager and Final Checking:*

Edit Sándor

*Head of Production:* Katia Besimensky

*Head of Finance:* Ivan Rouveure

*1st Assistant Director:* Rémi Chayé

*Screenplay:* Fabrice Ziolkowski

*Story:* Tomm Moore

*Storyboard:* Rémi Chayé

*Animation Studios:* Cartoon Saloon, A Man & Ink,

Walking the Dog, Kecskemét Film, Lightstar,

Digital Graphics Studio, Blue Spirit Studio

*Compositing Supervisors:* Anton Roebben,

Didier Henry, Damien Leydet

*Animation Supervisor:* Fabian Erlinghåuser

*Creative Supervisor:* Anton Roebben

*Head of FX:* Jeremy Purcell

*Editor:* Fabienne Alvarez-Giro

*Editorial Advisor:* Joseph Fitzpatrick

*Art Director:* Ross Stewart

*Character Design:* Tomm Moore, Barry Reynolds

*Final Character Design:* Barry Reynolds

*Viking Designs:* Jean Baptiste Vendamme

*Film Laboratory:* Arane Gulliver

*Music/Composer:* Bruno Coulais

*With special contribution from:* Kila

*Choir:* Choeur de Chambre Mikrokosmos

*Sound Design:* Jean-Marc Lentrelien

*Sound Designer:* Sébastien Marquilly

*Sound Supervisor:* Bruno Seznec

*Voice Recording Co-ordinator:* Kairen Waloch

*Sound Recording Mixer:* Fabien Devillers

*Supervising Sound Editor:* Jean-Marc Lentrelien

*Sound Editor:* Sébastien Marquilly

*Sound Editing:* Sébastien Cortequise,

Alexandre Fleurant

*Voice Cast:*

Evan McGuire (*Brendan*)

Mick Lally (*Brother Aidan of Iona*)

Housed in the Library at Trinity College Dublin since 1661, the ninth-century manuscript the Book of Kells, in which monks intricately illustrated the four Gospels, is held to be one of Ireland's greatest cultural treasures. What then to make of this Irish-French-Belgian animated feature shaping the story of its creation for a modern-day family audience? The cynical might be expecting some dumbed-down oirishry aimed at the cinematic equivalent of gullible tourists, so it's a pleasure to discover a film that matches striking visual artistry with a highly respectful attitude to its historical material, all the while making valiant attempts to engage with the narrative expectations of audiences weened on Disney, Pixar and DreamWorks.

At the heart of the action is young orphan Brendan, caught between his stern but caring uncle, Abbot Cellach, who forbids him to venture outside the walled community of Kells into the dangerous wilds beyond, and Aidan, the master illustrator who encourages him to explore the forest, confront his fears and unleash his imagination.

The subject-matter really is far from conventional kiddieanimation fare – even the likes of Pixar have yet to attempt a family-friendly story about the cultural significance of an illustrated biblical manuscript and its survival amid the forces of pagan pillage (or indeed to integrate the graphical ideas found in such venerable tomes into a film's visual design). In this respect, the achievement of co-directors Tomm Moore and Nora Twomey is something extraordinary. The 2D approach, while redolent of the low-budget television of years gone by, is less an economic restriction than a creative imperative – after all, the monks' painstaking gold-leaf and organic-dyed creations were laid down before the notion of perspective changed the art of representation, so the filmmakers are paying tribute to the flattened volume and exquisite repeating motifs of their original inspiration.

The arrayed ranks of fiddlehead ferns and other foliage mark just one of the instances in which the film's art direction turns the natural world into something with its own angular beauty, while the seemingly simple lines of amenable sprite Aisling in her wolf form, or Aidan's charismatically aloof cat Pangur Bán, are as captivating as their way of gliding through the frame's foreshortened perspectives. You'd think that the reduced dimensionality would make it trickier to convey a sense of place, yet the contrast between the cosseted environment of the monks' scriptorium and the shadowy trees and spookily ancient statues guarding the lair of underworld creature Crom Cruach comes across very well. What's more, the sheer vibrancy of the colour – the intense emerald green Aidan cooks up from the plants Brendan has gathered for him, the eye-searing red of the flames as the Viking invaders do their worst – has its effect too.

With its broad adherence to historical background and artistic legacy, its investment in Gaelic names and myth-making (plus Bruno Coulais' marvellous score, which takes on elements of traditional Irish music without falling into twiddly-diddly clichés), there's a sense of – dare one say it – Irish cultural pride here, notwithstanding the presence of coproducers and technical expertise from elsewhere in Europe. Perhaps that explains why the importance the story puts on the great book is almost taken as read ('The secret that turns darkness

Christen Mooney (*Aisling*)  
Brendan Gleeson (*Abbot Cellach*)  
Liam Hourican (*Brother Tang/Leonardo*)  
Paul Tylak (*Brother Assoua*)  
Michael McGrath (*adult Brendan*)  
Paul Young (*Brother Square*)  
France-Belgium-Ireland 2009©  
79 mins  
Digital

## CARTOON SALOON AT 25

### The Secret of Kells

Sat 6 Jan 12:10

### Song of the Sea

Sat 13 Jan 12:00

### The Short Films of Cartoon Saloon + Q&A with Cartoon Saloon's Nora Twomey, Tomm Moore and Paul Young

Sat 20 Jan 11:30

### The Breadwinner + Q&A with Nora Twomey

Sat 20 Jan 14:10

### Wolfwalkers + Q&A with director Tomm Moore

Sat 21 Jan 12:15

### My Father's Dragon

Sat 27 Jan 12:00

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#### Funday: Puffin Rock and the New Friends

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into light,' Brendan calls it), though strangely the actual content of the pages is never really explained, as if there's some unease about celebrating the Christian message and the triumph over paganism. Then again, an explicitly religious reading would surely get in the way of the film's undeniably stirring paean to artistry for its own sake, since the visuals certainly leave the viewer's imagination free to soar.

Trevor Johnston, *Sight and Sound*, November 2010

## Director Tomm Moore on 'The Secret of Kells'

With this film the main ambition for myself and my main collaborators on the production had been to tell a story that is entertaining and captivating for a young audience while dealing with themes that will carry a resonance for all ages.

As well as telling a fantasy-adventure story set in an exciting period of Ireland's history we endeavoured to bring a taste of Irish culture and design to the screen and to deal with the importance of art and enlightenment even in challenged and difficult times. The film explores some universal themes. For example, between Brendan and his guardian Abbot Cellach there is the classic conflict between parent and child as they find their way in the world. Between Brother Aidan and Brendan there is the story of mentor and student. With Aisling we explore themes of friendship and sacrifice. Ultimately I believe it is a story of redemption, continuity and hope.

Writing the story and developing the look of the location and characters required extensive research. For the fantasy elements such as the enchanted forest and Crom Cruach we turned to Irish legends and fairy tales. Other parts of the film are based on the actual history of the time, as far as it is known.

It was important to have a naturalness to the dialogue and the actors' performance to allow a modern audience to relate to the story and also to preserve the quality of the Irish accent and expressions: certain points in Aisling's speech and in her song link her to the more ancient world of myth.

The visual style of the film is inspired by ancient Celtic Art and illuminated medieval manuscripts, including of course, the *Book of Kells*.

The animation is primarily staged and drawn using the limited perspective and geometry that is strongly reminiscent of medieval art. This style was quite challenging to translate to screen but we feel the final result justified the extra effort. We feel we have found a style that is unique and appropriate to the story.

Many of the locations are based on ancient Irish monuments. For example Kells Abbey itself is based partly on research but of course is exaggerated and stylised. For the scenes in the forest we looked at the passage graves and stone carvings from the Megalithic period and incorporated their design into the background art. We used mainly traditional hand drawn techniques supplemented by carefully crafted computer animation. The digital techniques were used for complex or difficult sequences, and were specially designed to fit the style.

Production notes