



DNA Films evolves into bigger projects

\$45 million 3D 'Dredd' is biggest title yet

By Diana Lodderhose

December 4, 2010,

There's new blood coursing through the veins at DNA Films. At present, the U.K. shingle that has been behind a slew of indie Brit pics including "28 Days Later" and "The Last King of Scotland," is expanding its horizons and venturing into bigger budgeted waters with pics that need wide releases, starting with upcoming \$45 million 3D action pic "Dredd," which is lensing in Cape Town.

Perhaps these bold legs come from muscle the shingle has gained from the past seven years thanks to a joint venture with Fox Searchlight. Back in 2003, the shingle, which was founded by Duncan Kenworthy and Andrew Macdonald in 1997, secured one of the most trenchant Blighty-based studio-backed deals after Working Title, when it locked a \$50 million joint venture with Searchlight to make Brit pics for worldwide distribution.

Aim was to create a production house with long-term viability with \$25 million pushed into the pot from Fox and \$25 million of production finance from DNA, from which it was previously awarded by the Arts Council of England. Projects were greenlit directly by DNA and benefited from a guaranteed release commitment from Fox Searchlight.

And the union bore a steady stream of commercial and critical successes including "The Last King of Scotland," "Notes on a Scandal," "Sunshine" and "28 Weeks Later."

But now that the co-financing deal has dried up, DNA's viability is cemented and the outfit is ready to charter new waters while maintaining its relationship with Fox.

"We have an incredibly close relationship with Searchlight," says producer Allon Reich, who runs the DNA operation alongside Macdonald. "We remain committed to this relationship and we're historically a huge supplier for them. That's the studio where we have the closest relationships and they're like gold dust. We value them.



"What we're committed to doing is making European films for international distribution," he says. "And for a certain type of film, we'll continue to try and make it with Searchlight but now we're open for more independent financing and structuring and distribution, which is what we're doing with 'Dredd.'" And the outfit is certainly hitting the new ground running. Stuart Ford's IM Global and Reliance Big Pictures decided its first full collaboration would be to fully finance the \$45 million 3D comic book adaptation "Dredd," which is helmed by "Vantage Point's" Pete Travis and stars Karl Urban and Olivia Thirlby. Ford pre-shopped the pic, penned by "28 Days Later" and "Sunshine" scribe Alex Garland, to buyers at Toronto this year and secured north of \$30 million in foreign pre-sales, with Entertainment nabbing U.K. rights for a mammoth \$7 million.

Six weeks later, Lionsgate snapped up domestic rights.

"It's exciting for us to be working with Lionsgate and Entertainment," says Reich. "It's a different budget and this is the kind of film that needs a wide release, which is not what Searchlight does."

Reich, who previously worked with him at Miramax, says Ford "really wanted" the movie after seeing Garland's script. "It's exciting and nerve-wrecking," he says. "But 'Dredd' felt like it fitted with this kind of scenario."

Reich says the hope for this ambitious project is to lay the grounds for a three-part franchise but insists the shingle will continue to make quality, modestly-budgeted pics.

"One of the joys of filmmaking is that you can always do different things," says Reich. "It's fantastic to make bigger franchise, genre movies but we still want to make the kinds of films we've made in the past. This is definitely an aspiration for us."

The shingle also recently produced "Never Let Me Go," (the last pic under the Searchlight financing deal) starring Keira Knightley, Carey Mulligan and Andrew Garfield, which opened the London Film Festival. Pic, which disappointed at the box office in the U.S. at just \$2.3 million, is still up for six awards at the British Independent Film Awards and is having a BAFTA campaign before its Feb. 11 release in Blighty. But Reich adds it's increasingly difficult to raise finance for any type of film given the current turbulent financial market.

"Raising finance for whatever you're doing is not simple," he says. "You have to try and diversify a little bit and look at how you can maximize what your strengths are. It's difficult to run a company on solely arthouse Brit indie movies just because TV is squeezed and DVD is squeezed."

This diversification could even see the shingle tapping into television production in the future. Reich says the shingle is "in conversations for one or two projects with broadcasters."

"Andrew and I have always massively admired top end comedy and drama on TV," he says. "Some of the things we're jealous of come out of television."

And will DNA enjoy a union with IM Global/Reliance similar to its Searchlight union?

"Every relationship has two sides," says Reich. "What you hope is that at the end of the process it's been positive and if it has been there will be the opportunity to do more things."