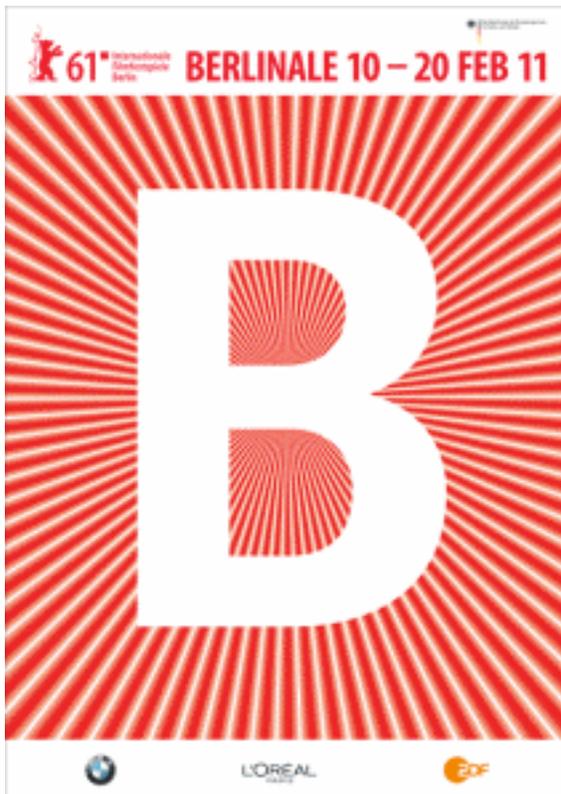


Euro Film Market: Indie Bounce Continues?

By **TIM ADLER** in London

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Before the European Film Market (EFM) in Berlin kicks off, one of the most important events of the international film industry, I've provided a rundown on the hottest titles up for grabs (see below). For these during the Berlinale Film Festival, there's wheeling and dealing on the latest productions on the global film scene. North American distributors looking to fill their slots have never been that keen on European indie films, especially dramas, which are often harder to market. That is until *The King's Speech* heated up the box office and garnered 12 Oscar nominations. "There's plenty of business in these kinds of films providing they're made for the right price," Lionsgate UK CEO Zygi Kamasa tells me. A-list stars in a good script will always sell. Stars featured in films sold in this market include Cameron Diaz, Rachel Weisz and Orlando Bloom. And Madonna will be on hand this

Saturday, amping up press interest, when IM Global screens promo footage of her royal abdication drama *W.E.*, starring Abbie Cornish, Andrea Riseborough and James D'Arcy. The problem, as always, are the iffier projects.

Sundance has always been a busier market than Berlin because of the kind of indie films that screen there. But the recent Sundance bounce in deals is spreading hope in advance of Berlin. "If you look at the 38 deals done at Sundance, there definitely seems to be a lot of optimism in the marketplace," says Mike Runagall, senior vice-president of Pathé International who's selling *Don't Be Afraid of the Dark*. "But you have to have the right kind of product. It has to be strong in terms of cast and subject matter." However, Runagall predicts, "I don't think there's a huge amount of new product. People will be holding back for Cannes."

Tim Haslam, CEO of Hanway Films, has overheard Hollywood talent agents saying how well they're doing out of the indie business at the moment. "I think it's going to be quite a good market. But of course, I'm a salesman so I always have to be confident."

The acid test for Berlin will be whether markets that have almost gone through the floor such as Japan and Spain will come back. Japanese buyers overpaid for films in the past and then the bubble burst, with many local distributors going out of business. And Spain has been plagued with piracy – one producer told me that he saw his film for sale on the street from his car window while he was on his way to its premiere.

Eighty per cent of the 723 films registered so far for this year's EFM will be market premieres. To date, 400 exhibitors are registered from 54 countries. There will be 1,421 buyers coming from 59 countries. And the number of people attending this year's event is 4% higher at 6,698.

This year there will be a special market sidebar highlighting 47 films fresh from the Sundance Film Festival. Titles playing in "Straight From Sundance" include Another Happy Day, starring Ellen Barkin and Demi Moore; The Ledge, picked up by IFC at Sundance; and Gun Hill Road, which Motion Film Group took worldwide rights to at Park City.

Here are the films now considered the hottest titles:

THE DEEP BLUE SEA -- Rachel Weisz and Tom Hiddleston star in Terence Davies' adaptation of Terence Rattigan's play. Weisz plays a woman unhappily married to Simon Russell Beale who has a passionate affair with a callous RAF pilot after the Second World War. (Protagonist)

DON'T BE AFRAID OF THE DARK -- Producers Guillermo del Toro (Pan's Labyrinth) and Mark Johnson (Chronicles of Narnia) are behind this chiller about a little girl who unwittingly unleashes malevolent creatures in an old mansion. Katie Holmes and Guy Pearce star. (Pathe International)

ECHELON -- A movie adaptation of Brit soldier-turned-thriller writer Andy McNab's bestseller. McNab has become a tough guy brand himself branching out into YA novels as well as his Nick Stone action thriller series. (Hyde Park International)

GAMBIT – Man-of-the-moment Colin Firth and Cameron Diaz star in this Joel and Ethan Coen-scripted remake of the 1966 movie. Michael Hoffman (*The Last Station*) directs this story of a London art curator who plans to con a wealthy collector into buying a phony Monet painting. The film will shoot in London this May. (FilmNation)

I, ALEX CROSS – Tyler Perry is the controversial choice to play Alex Patterson's investigator in this reboot of the film series that starred Morgan Freeman. Rob Cohen is the director. Paramount Pictures is keen to distribute in North America. (QED International)

THE KILLER – John H Lee is directing this English-language remake of John Woo's 1989 Hong Kong action movie, which will star Jung Woo-Sung. John Woo and his producer partner Terence Chang will produce, ensuring this new 3D version does not stray too far from the classic action movie. (Essential Entertainment)

THE LAUREATE – Orlando Bloom, Imogen Poots and Kerry Condon star in this story about the love triangle between young poet Robert Graves, his wife Nancy and his great love Laura Riding. William Nunez directs. (Media 8)

PUNCTURE – Chris Evans and Vinessa Shaw star in this legal thriller about a drug-addicted lawyer overcoming personal demons as he takes on a health company. (Voltage Pictures)

POM WONDERFUL PRESENTS: THE GREATEST MOVIE EVER SOLD -- Morgan Spurlock's product placement expose was a hit at Sundance. Sponsors including POM, Jet Blue and Hyatt Hotels & Resorts fully funded Spurlock's \$1.5 million docu. (ContentFilm International)

RED STATE – The Kevin Smith-directed film stars Michael Parks, Michael Angarano, Kyle Gallner, John Goodman and Melissa Leo. A group of misfits encounter extreme fundamentalism in Middle America. Smith angered distribution executives in Sundance

when he announced that he will self-release Red State in the U.S. with a mini-tour followed by a platformed theatrical release in October. (IM Global)

A THOUSAND KISSES DEEP -- Dougray Scott, Jodie Whittaker and Emilia Fox star in this Brit thriller about a woman who finds herself jumping forwards and backwards in time after she witnesses a suicide. Currently in post-production, a promo reel will be available. (Goldcrest Films International)

W.E. -- Abbie Cornish stars as a young married New Yorker obsessed with what she perceives as the ultimate romantic love story: Edward VIII's abdication for his love of Wallis Simpson. Andrea Riseborough plays Simpson and James D'Arcy, Edward. Madonna is the director. (IM Global)