

## Welcome To The Punch

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### **How did the UK film-makers behind *Welcome To The Punch* attract an A-list cast, top financiers and Ridley Scott?**

Made for just \$153,000 (£100,000) under Film London's Microwave scheme in 2008, Eran Creevy's *Shifty* was one of the most impressive UK debut features in recent years. With a sharpness that belied its micro-budget origins, the urban crime thriller scored a Bafta nomination and put Creevy and his producers, Ben Pugh and Rory Aitken of London-based *Between The Eyes*, into the industry spotlight.

Their follow-up, *Welcome To The Punch*, is now in post. The film is an action thriller about a London detective (James McAvoy) and an ex-criminal (Mark Strong) forced to return from his Icelandic hideaway, who become allies in a bid to expose a high-level conspiracy. The cast also includes Andrea Riseborough and Peter Mullan.

*Between The Eyes* is producing and has Automatik on board as US co-producer, with Scott Free London, IM Global, Alliance Films and Worldview Entertainment executive producing.

Creevy started work on the script more than three years ago while travelling to festivals with *Shifty*. "We never wrote to a budget," he says. "We wanted to be as ambitious as possible. People are held back by a budget and a concept sometimes, but I knew that if I made it good enough it wouldn't matter."

Tonally, Creevy aimed for something with a larger scope than traditional UK action-thrillers. "We looked at other markets that generate major action films like the US, Hong Kong and France and thought about how they generate such box-office appeal while retaining a local identity." Shortly after the Baftas in 2010 — where *Shifty* was nominated for outstanding British debut — Creevy signed to CAA. "I gave them a script within a month," he says. "I had the opportunity to sign to CAA when *Shifty* had first screened a year before, but I didn't want to go too early as I'd have got a lot of scripts and I wanted to concentrate on *Punch*."

Pugh recalls the importance of playing a waiting game. "While Eran wrote a few more drafts, his agents at CAA and Independent stoked heat around the screenplay so when we did send it out there was a lot of buzz. Lionsgate, Icon, Pathé, Hyde Park were all interested. Working Title had read it within three hours and wanted to meet on it. We were lucky because that pattern continued and there was a competitive situation."

The script claimed third place on the 2010 Brit List, a survey of the hottest unproduced UK screenplays. Meanwhile, CAA was stealing a march in the US. "Roeg Sutherland [co-head of CAA's Film Finance and Sales Group] gave it to a number of people he thought it would be

appropriate for, including [his former CAA colleague] Brian Kavanaugh-Jones of Automatik,” says Pugh.

The Kavanaugh-Jones-run Automatik, a joint venture between Alliance Films and IM Global, came on board in early 2010. It was a logical move for both parent companies to board the project, though IM Global decided only to handle sales rather than finance the film. Alliance ensured a minimum guarantee for distribution in the territories in which it operates: Canada, the UK (Momentum Pictures) and Spain (Aurum).

The project’s blend of UK and US styles impressed Momentum Pictures managing director Xavier Marchand. “There was a bidding war to get hold of the script,” he says. “We got it around March 2010 and were impressed because in some ways this isn’t a traditional British film despite the story and cast being very British. The look of it is more reminiscent of US films like Michael Mann’s *Collateral*.”

“I had seen *Shifty* and was a fan of the film but *Welcome To The Punch* was a very different thing,” agrees IM Global CEO Stuart Ford. “Though the film is a leap for Eran, his passion and intelligence impressed us immediately. The screenplay was very slick, clever, commercial and fast-paced.”

Automatik secured a large part of the US equity from New York-based production and investment company Worldview, which came in against the US rights while Scott Free London also boarded the film, with Ridley Scott as a creative collaborator and the company’s head of film and television Liza Marshall also developing the project.

The producers completed the financing in Cannes 2011, with gap funding coming from London-based Quickfire and the UK Film Council/BFI providing a final equity injection of \$765,000 (£500,000).

“Classic multi-party independent financing is never easy,” says Ford. “That being said, the movie sold out worldwide. We sold most of international based on the script and the talent package, and also Ridley’s involvement, in Cannes 2011. We finished the job at AFM, even pre-selling tough territories like Japan, South Korea and Hong Kong. For a British movie from a second-time director to sell out within two markets speaks volumes for people’s appetite for the movie. The US is the last piece of the puzzle.” CAA and UTA are jointly representing US rights.

The seven-week UK shoot began on July 28 last year, with filming taking place largely in London’s financial district and at 3 Mills Studios in east London. Creevy retained some of his creative team from *Shifty*, including cinematographer Ed Wild and composer Harry Escott.

The scale of the shoot represented a challenge for Creevy and his UK producers. “Normally people make a ton of short films and experiment, but before *Shifty* I had never told an actor what to do on set before,” admits the director. He did not have time to ease into the shoot. “In terms of challenges, the first two weeks were very action heavy. Squibs were going off everywhere. The first day on set was a huge action scene. A whole side of a hotel wall was blown out by gunfire. If we’d done it wrong we would have had to reset the wall, put all the squibs back in and done a two-hour reset, pushing us behind from day one. You have to grab the bull by the horns. And thankfully many times luck was on our side.”

The shoot was shut down for one day due to the London riots, but the team were ready for such unforeseen mishaps. “It comes down to preparation, preparation, preparation,” says Creevy. “We

storyboarded everything to within an inch of its life.”

### **Intense edit**

Ridley Scott’s biggest influence on the project has been during the edit, when he has taken time out from *Prometheus* to advise on *Welcome To The Punch* — an experience Creevy describes as “incredible”.

“The edit has been intense,” Creevy says. “For six weeks it was just me and my editor Chris Gill in the room, and now it’s Ridley Scott, Brian Kavanaugh-Jones, Stuart Ford, Xavier Marchand, Robert Walak all having an input... all these guys have invested a lot. Some days I’m in love with the film, some days I hate it. But that’s normal.”

Despite so many wise heads, Creevy has retained creative control. “No-one is forcing notes on me. I’ve had massive creative freedom. You pick the best notes that you agree with and try to hold onto your artistic integrity. We’re trying to find that balance between the smarts and mass appeal. We are managing to do that.”

Creevy, Pugh and Aitken have come a long way from the micro-budget *Shifty*, and Between The Eyes’ future projects are already generating buzz (the company recently optioned F Scott Frazier’s script *Autobahn*, an action-chase film set on a German motorway).

“We give ourselves a hard time but should remember that *Punch* is only the second feature we’ve made together,” says Creevy. “We just get on with it.”