

## Can Carey Mulligan, James Franco and Tom Hardy Play the Global Market? (Berlin)

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*Getty Images*

Jesse Eisenberg, Justin Timberlake, Carey Mulligan, Andrew Garfield and James Franco are riding high on the casting wish lists for sellers in Berlin looking to package their projects for foreigner buyers.

But which, if any, of this emerging generation of fresh faces will get global buyers salivating, and signing those pre-buys, in the way that Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger did three decades ago?

Especially when buyers are still salivating over Stallone, thanks to the box office success of *The Expendables* (\$274 million and counting), which co-starred Jason Statham, one of the few actors of the new generation who's name does guarantee sales.

Stallone and Statham return for *The Expendables 2*, being shopped here in Berlin by Nu Image. IM Global has *Headshot*, with Stallone as the aging action hero alongside a still-to-be-named younger star as well as Statham-starrer *Safe*.

Statham is also attached to or in talks for myriad other projects including Tony Scott's Potsdamer Platz, the thriller Echelon and prohibition-era actioner Pretty, Baby, Machine.

Even Statham and action star and rom-com heartthrob Gerard Butler, another name to reassure anxious acquisition executives, are approaching their 40s.

In the 20-something set, there are few actors buyers will bank on.

But there is plenty of potential. Think of Rooney Mara, the girl who came ahead of Carey Mulligan and Natalie Portman for the title role in David Fincher's The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo. Or Tom Hardy, the cheeky master impersonator in Chris Nolan's Inception who will play baddie Bane in Nolan's new Batman movie The Dark Knight Rises.

Then there's Chloe Moretz, the pint-sized assassin in Kick-Ass. Or Jennifer Lawrence, Oscar-nominated for Winter's Bone and the belle of this year's Sundance? And Andrea Riseborough of Brighton's Rock, who stars in W.E., which Madonna screened footage of for Berlin buyers Saturday night?

"There is certainly a new generation of fresh faces coming through," said one U.K.-based seller. "There is talent out there for both art house and commercial cross-border material but talent alone in either category doesn't guarantee a pre-sale."

"When we look at a casting list with younger actors, we often say any of top 10 here would be O.K., because they don't have that much impact on international sales," adds Daniel Baur of K5 International. "If you have a Johnny Depp, a Brad Pitt, a Leonardo Di Caprio, fine. But after that short list there's a long drop."

In fact, international buyers are more likely to look at the guy behind the camera before they decide to sign.

"For a mid-budget film, the director's name is more important than the actors," Baur said. "You want to make sure you have someone who will deliver the film. And if you have the right director, you'll get the actors anyway because people will want to work with them."

This dovetails with an increased international appetite for effects-heavy and high-concept films. Inception and The Social Network had impressive casts but directors Nolan and Fincher were the headline draws.

"It's become much more an auteur-driven system," said Constantin Film's Robert Kulzer. "You want someone who can deliver the visuals, who can take the audience on a journey."

Kulzer, whose upcoming project with Screen Gems, The Mortal Instruments, features hot-name-of-the-moment Alex Pettyfer, also warns that the fresh faces coming up may have a shorter shelf life than the generation of stars that preceded them.

"So much of the hype around new actors is driven by online social networks and they are incredibly volatile," Kulzer said. "Someone who is incredibly hot this week can be gone the next."

And some of the old guard can still bring it. Following Stallone's lead, Schwarzenegger last week gave his agency CAA the green light to start accepting new offers of projects. Hasta La Vista pre-sales.