

Venice: Making Locke under the radar

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EXCLUSIVE: The team behind Tom Hardy drama Locke talk about how they quickly put the project together and shot in only eight nights.

Eight nights, one star, one car. That's the formula behind Locke, Steven Knight's UK drama that has its world premiere in Venice tonight [Sept 2].



Tom Hardy stars as Ivan Locke, an ordinary guy with a loving family and burgeoning career, whose life changes during the course of 85 minutes – the time of one single car journey.

“He’s the most ordinary guy in the world, a construction director working on a huge skyscraper,” says Shoebox Films director Paul Webster. “The film takes place on the eve of the biggest moment of his career. He’s got a home a wife, two kids, a perfect job. By the end of the movie he has none of these things.”

The low-budget drama was shot in real time in an under-the-radar production that reunited Knight with his *Hummingbird* partners Shoebox Films and IM Global.

“This was an inkling in Steve Knight’s brain in November 2012, and we were shooting the movie by February 26,” says Webster. “It’s the fastest turnaround I’ve ever been involved in.”

Webster recalls, “Steve said, ‘I want to do something quite different, in a confined space, about a guy whose life changes during the course of one car journey. And we never leave the car.’”

Webster and Shoebox partner Guy Heeley were intrigued by the idea but knew they’d need to make it on a small budget and with a “big actor.” As it happened, Knight was already set to meet Tom Hardy to discuss another project, and they agreed to work together on *Locke*.

Once Hardy signed on, Heeley, Webster and Knight made a call to Stuart Ford of IM Global, who had just worked with them on Knight’s directorial debut *Hummingbird*.

“We pitched over the phone, we outlined the basic finance structure, and on that same phone call he said, ‘I’m in.’” IM Global financed the entire budget (which is pegged at less than \$2 million) and Lionsgate UK (which also

distributed *Hummingbird*) quickly came on for UK rights. The film also took advantage of the UK film tax credit.

Ford tells Screen: “We had a great collaborative experience making *Hummingbird* with Steve Knight, Paul Webster, Guy Heeley and Zygi Kamasa of Lionsgate UK. *Hummingbird* was a profitable movie for IM Global before the cameras even started rolling and we collectively had all enjoyed working together. I was already looking for an opportunity to jump back into business with that team.”

Hardy’s schedule proved to be a guiding force in the project – as he only had two weeks free for both rehearsing and shooting.

Ford adds: “Once I’d said ‘yes’ the canny Mr Webster THEN told me they wanted to be in production six weeks later. We wired the first pre-production funding the next morning before we’d even figured out a deal. Kamasa also jumped in to prebuy UK rights as soon as Paul asked him to.”

Knight, whose screenwriting credits include *Eastern Promises* and *Dirty Pretty Things*, churned out the script in just a few weeks.

A ‘crazy’ shoot

Hardy shot for six nights and there were then two nights of pickup shots. “It was an eight-night shoot,” Webster says with pride. “It was pretty full on, but Tom was so prepared and Steve is the calmest director you could imagine. But it was still crazy.”

The other actors — Olivia Colman, Ruth Wilson, Andrew Scott, Ben Daniels and Tom Holland — talk to Locke on the phone while he’s driving. They were calling in live on the phone, based in a hotel room on the night shoots while Hardy was driving around.

Heeley’s strong working relationship with Knight and his years of experience on set as a first AD made him essential to getting Locke made, Webster says. “He’s the best collaborator. The movie wouldn’t have been made without him, he’s absolutely essential to the whole thing. “

Webster says that in addition to being a bankable name, Hardy was the right kind of actor for the role. “He’s one of the best actors in the world at the moment, he’s got incredible charisma, he just holds the screen beautifully...It’s a real challenge for him, it’s only him on screen, the other actors are off screen. It’s unadorned, it’s relentless... He’s a powerful film presence but this is the first time that Tom’s done a straight drama like this.”

Cinematographer Haris Zambarloukos had just shot Jack Ryan so he knew a thing or two about shooting cars. They mounted the car on a low loader, and rigged three

cameras to ensure three different angles. Of course, the film shot digitally. “That’s the beauty of working with the Alexa and the RED is that you can shoot at night with very low light conditions,” Webster notes. “The movie is incredibly beautiful to look at.”

High anticipation in Venice

There was no press launch for the film – in fact it was only confirmed the week production started by *Screen*’s US editor Jeremy Kay (story here). “We wanted it to be a complete surprise, and it’s a movie that should be discovered by people,” Webster says.

Now that the Venice premiere is looming, Webster jokes that it’s a good companion piece to opening night film *Gravity*. “Alfonso Cuarón made a movie in the limitless infinity of space. And we’re in the very confined interior of a BMW SUV.”

More seriously, he says Venice is “a perfect fit, Alberto [Barbera, artistic director] really loved the movie, it’s a pretty competitive year for British cinema, we got exactly what we wanted as an out of competition slot and I think that’s perfect.”

There is a now a lot of anticipation to see the film by critics as well as potential buyers. Ford says: “Our intention was just to quietly make the modestly budgeted movie, fund it in cash and then think about sales and distribution once we had something in the can.”

But when the *Screen* story broke in Berlin, Ford says “a trio of overseas distributors with whom IM Global does a lot of business, Metropolitan (France), Sun (Latin America) and West Films (Russia) immediately said they wanted to be onboard and based on our longstanding relationships with three great companies we elected to pre-sell those territories whilst resolving not to sell to anyone else without a finished movie. Which is where we stand today despite the litany of US and international offers we’ve had over the past three to four months.”

Ford says this kind of project represents how IM Global can take a gamble on films they think can break out and exceed expectations – akin to previous projects like *Paranormal Activity*, *A Single Man*, *Insidious* and *The Inbetweeners*. “We’re keeping our fingers crossed that *Locke* continues that tradition. The next few weeks will be very telling,” Ford says.

Up next for Shoebox are two titles to be directed by the company’s other founding partner, Joe Wright. He will first shoot his live action adaptation of *The Little Mermaid* with Working Title and Universal and after that an adaptation of Neil Gaiman’s *Ocean At The End of The Lane* (with Focus Features), which Jack Thorne is now adapting.

And would Webster work on such quick turnaround project like *Locke* again? “I absolutely would do it again....It’s completely liberating, the low budget and the very extreme conditions.”

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