Virgil Widrich • Director

by Tina Poglajen

19/10/2016 - After world-premiering at Busan and winning an audience award, Virgil Widrich screened *Night of a 1000 Hours* in the international competition of the 32nd Warsaw Film Festival

Night of a 1000 Hours is Austrian director, screenwriter and multimedia artist **Virgil Widrich**'s third feature film, following countless experimental, animated and documentary shorts that he has made over a career that spans more than 30 years. In a way, the film is an extravagant experiment in itself, employing an inventive set design, the use of rear projections to create a surreal period mansion. Cineuropa spoke with the director before the film screened at the 32nd Warsaw Film Festival.

(The article continues below - Commercial information)

Cineuropa: How did you develop the idea for this film?
Virgil Widrich: The first idea I had was something like judgement day in the Bible – all of the dead rising one day to be judged. I don't believe in judging anyone, but I was interested in a situation where everybody came back. Suddenly, there are no secrets anymore, because everyone who lived through something is back. I thought about it for a few years and never found a solution, because it's such a big idea. Then I realised that we all have two parents, four grand-parents, eight great-grand-parents, in what is a binary family tree. Over 20 generations, you have 1,000,000 ancestors. Why not put all of these people in one family, and why not reduce it all to one house? So we have a family and a house and they get visitors, unwanted family members, but they're all dead. There are no ghosts – just family members who get on your nerves, but don't ever leave the house. One of the characters is missing and that gives the plot a twist of mystery. Then there's the love story between a man of today and a woman from the past, which reminded me of *Vertigo*, a filmthat I really enjoy.

Could you talk a bit about the set design?
We were discussing how to do the house, and I had previously worked on a musical theatre production in Luxembourg, for which we used rear projections on the stage. It was all projected from behind, on three screens. This was very beautiful and actually quite simple to achieve. So I asked myself, why not do it for the house on the film set? It's a surreal story, why build a house and then light it in a way that is a bit strange, why don't we make it strange from the beginning?

So with **Christina Schaffer**, we designed a digital house. This kind of set design is new – it was invented for this film. **Christian Berger**, our DoP, had to work hard on the lighting, because it's a very complicated process to light the actors without lighting the walls or getting indirect light on the screens. In the scene with the bodies, most of them were projected, and the front of them was real. We used it to achieve a fantastical effect – things seem to be real, but they're wrong somehow, the colours are different to what you'd find in reality. So we made magic on the set. I wanted to create the distinct styles of the different times, so I needed iconic clothes and clearly distinguishable colours. Every character has their own colour, and they don't get changed. The only ones that do are Philip, when he puts on a new shirt, and the father, who dresses up for the Nazi party.

How did you decide on the Nazi element?
It's unavoidable. In a sense, you can't tell this story without touching on the Nazi era. I think it's something that was very common. It's not as though everyone was the top SS slaughterer, that was very rare, but it was more everyday people using the system of the times, and the power they had, as an economic or business advantage.