

AFM: German Shingles Have Emerged as Top Sellers of Commercial Fare



NOVEMBER 5, 2013 | 01:21PM PT

Leo Barraclough (<http://variety.com/author/leo-barraclough/>)

Few countries have such a varied and strong sales sector as Germany. There are more than 10 German sales companies at the AFM, and others that are not at the market — like M-Appeal and Films Boutique — are very active on the indie pic sales circuit.

Each of the German sales companies has strong slates of international films, and is fiercely competitive when it comes to securing the best projects, but each is different.

Among the top Teutonic sellers is Beta Cinema, whose AFM slate is headlined by the \$35.4 million adventure epic "[The Physician](http://variety.com/t/the-physician/)." Beta is holding exclusive sneak previews for Philipp Stoelzl's pic, which toplines Ben Kingsley, Stellan Skarsgard and Tom Payne, for buyers in territories that are still available.

Another of its hot pics is "The Devil's Violinist" (<http://variety.com/2013/biz/news/afm-german-shingles-have...>), a biopic of Niccolò Paganini starring long-haired violin virtuoso David Garrett. The film receives its market premiere at AFM. It is typical of the kind of film that works best at AFM.

"It is not a festival type of film; it is a very commercially minded film that is the right film to launch at AFM," says Thorsten Ritter, exec VP of acquisitions, sales and marketing at Beta Cinema. "It is English language; it has a €10 million (\$13.6 million) budget. It has a lot of elements that make it stand out in that market environment."

One of the most recent entrants to the international sales arena is Picture Tree Intl., which launched in December. The company may be young, but its founders — Andreas Rothbauer and Alec Schulmann — are old hands.

Rothbauer, who was formerly head of sales and acquisitions at Beta, sees Picture Tree as designed to meet the needs of the market by operating both as a sales agent, with a focus on the acquisition of European films, and a financier/co-producer of mainstream English-language projects. It also has ambitions to move into distribution.

"In the long run we have an eye on becoming a vertically integrated company that has the capability to release films in German-speaking territories on its own or in partnership," Rothbauer says. "Financing and production are merging more and more with international licensing and domestic distribution. Picture Tree is one example of a company that is addressing this."

The company is launching two films at AFM: supernatural thriller "Number 13" and boxing biopic "Victor 'Young' Perez," which are both international projects and well-suited for a commercially driven bazaar like AFM.

Another German company with a strong focus on commercial projects is Arri Worldsales, which spotlights its own particular strengths.

"We are not only active in co-production and international distribution, but (we) also bring a broad range of services from inside the Arri Group," says Moritz Hemminger, director of sales and acquisitions, referring to the parent company's ability to provide production services, including its cameras and vfx work.

Hemminger sees AFM as a good market for family-skewing titles, an area in

Little Ghost,” which is based on a bestselling kids book, “V8 — Start Your Engines!,” which they describe as a “Fast & Furious” for kids, and “Ploe — You Never Fly Alone.”

Another sales agent with powerful parents is Global Screen, which is the international sales unit of Bavaria Film — owner of a studio complex outside Munich — and Telepool, one of Germany’s biggest buyers of feature films. Like Beta, Global Screen has a strong television licensing operation, which allows it to split rights where needed.

While the other companies focus on their boutique credentials, Global Screen benefits from scale.

“We are now bigger than ever, offering a wider variety of films compared with other sales companies. Our line-up consists of commercial arthouse movies, family entertainment and theatrical documentaries,” says Julia Weber, head of theatrical sales.

Among its mainstream titles for an adult audience is Christian Alvar’s “Banklady,” which will be shown to buyers for the first time at AFM.

“It’s the true story of Germany’s first female bank robber, who carried out 19 armed robberies in the 1960s, and who came to national fame due to massive coverage in the yellow press, portraying her as a stylish and sexy vamp,” Weber says.

Global Screen also has a strong line-up of kids’ entertainment product.

K5 Intl. is based in Munich, but it also has offices in London and Los Angeles, and its focus is mainly on titles for a mainstream audience.

“Our slate is mainly English-language titles,” co-partner Oliver Simon says. “But we also love to find projects with crossover potential, that have something special that we can market to a wider audience.”

AFM is an important market for Simon and his biz partner Daniel Baur. “It’s definitely a market that’s more driven by genre than by story or drama,” Simon says. “It’s also a major moment in the market calendar for us, and a chance to connect with a lot of Asian and American buyers, who we might not meet other

The company's ability to access production coin is a major advantage.

"We can access our own funds, and do not have to approach the usual gap or equity financiers," says Simon. "We always have the opportunity to work with other financing sources, but we also have the rare ability to greenlight pictures, as we have already successfully done in the past on films such as 'Vehicle 19' and 'Night Train to Lisbon.' "

Its AFM highlights include Neil LaBute's "Dirty Weekend," in which Matthew Broderick plays a business exec who tries to find out the truth about a "lost" weekend; and "We'll Never Have Paris," the helming debut of "The Big Bang Theory" star Simon Helberg, who also toplines in the Paris-set romantic comedy about a man trying to win back his girlfriend.

The company now intends to chase bigger projects. "We're looking to expand into more commercial titles with larger budgets," says Simon. "We have the capability now to finance in a way we didn't a few years ago, so we can help to convert a project very quickly if we are passionate about it."

[SEE ALSO: AFM: New and Established Directors Fuel Germany's Exports \(http://variety.com/2013/biz/news/afm-german-directors-christian-petzold-oliver-hirschbiegel-1200798894/\)](http://variety.com/2013/biz/news/afm-german-directors-christian-petzold-oliver-hirschbiegel-1200798894/)