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SCREENDAILY

Night Train To Lisbon

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Bille August recruited some of Europe's most acclaimed actors for *Night Train To Lisbon*, the first film under a new partnership between Studio Hamburg and C-Films. Wendy Mitchell visited the set of the film.

Bille August maintains an air of mystery when talking about his new film *Night Train To Lisbon*, adapted from Pascal Mercier's 2004 bestselling novel of the same name.

"There was a special atmosphere and feeling in the book that stayed with me. Working on the script has been a lot about making this big novel into a two-hour film, but also maybe more important to try to create that very, very mysterious atmosphere. It's about a man who is trying to look for the truth. And slowly, scene by scene, new doors open and he meets a lot of secret and mysterious, inaccessible people," the Danish director tells *Screen* about the film, which wrapped its eight-week shoot earlier this month.

That "big novel" is about Swiss teacher Raimund Gregorius (Jeremy Irons), who meets a mysterious woman in Bern, Switzerland, leading him to a philosophical book by the author Amadeu de Prado — who lived during Portugal's Carnation Revolution (seen in historical scenes). The book inspires Raimund to take a journey of discovery to Lisbon.

Irons says: "It is not just my problem, it's also Bille's problem to condense the feeling of the book, the philosophy of the book, the emotion of the book into two hours of screen time. You can't play unspoken philosophy in a character; you can just play a journey of discovery, a journey of change."

Irons was the first choice for the complex lead role. The director says: "He is a wonderful, experienced actor. But he also has that intelligence and profoundness and diversity for an actor that is needed for the part."

Six years in the making

The film's genesis started six years ago when Swiss producer Peter Reichenbach of C-Films in Zurich read the novel, which became an international bestseller published in more than 30 countries (it sold 1.8 million copies in the German-speaking world.)

Reichenbach tells *Screen*: "There are a lot of very interesting characters, even if Raimund only meets someone once it's an important confrontation. I thought one could really get an interesting cast. Every role, no matter how small, has such substance."

Reichenbach developed the script for nearly three years, then brought on Studio Hamburg FilmProduktion (as well as attracting co-producers Tele Muenchen, C-Films Germany and Cinemate).

"C Films thought it would be too big to shoot on their own, so they came to us because we've known each other for 20 years," says Guenther Russ of Studio Hamburg FilmProduktion. "We rewrote it and started the financing process." Ulrich Herrmann wrote the script with August collaborator Greg Latter, and the budget raised was \$12.4m (€7.7m).

Producers are Andreas Knoblauch, Michael Lehmann, Kerstin Ramcke and Russ of Studio Hamburg, Reichenbach of C-Films Zurich and Benjamin Seikel from C-Films Germany.

August was on board for the past two years. Russ says: "Bille was at our side throughout the whole progress. It was very, very good working with him on the pre-production... Also, it's a complicated novel, a philosophical novel, so we had to look for a person who had the knowledge to make a film of philosophical thoughts. Bille is perfect."

StudioHamburg raised the financing, which is split 70% from Germany (half of that was state funding), 20% from Switzerland and 10% from Portugal. Backers include Germany's FFA, DFFF, FFHSH, MBB; Switzerland's BAK, Zuercher Filmstiftung, Eurimages, MEDIA, Portugal's Institute of Cinema and Audiovisual (ICA), Schweizer Fernsehen SRF and Teleclub.

Studio Hamburg was able to tap into German funds despite the project not shooting in Germany. "That was so important for us," adds Ramcke.

K5 came on board for international sales and also some financing. K5 finance partners PalmStar Media Capital and EFish Entertainment are also on board. Executive producers are K5's Oliver Simon and Daniel Baur, PalmStar's Kevin Frakes and EFish's Tom Reilly.

Distribution deals have already been done for Italy (Archibald), Eastern Europe (EEAP), Latin America (Swen) the Middle East (Falcon), Benelux (Paradiso). Concorde has German rights and Frenetic will release in Switzerland, while Lusomundo/Zon Audiovisuals releases in Portugal.

K5's Carl Clifton says: "Buyers are connecting with what attracted us when we jumped on board— a beautiful, textured and compelling script based on a highly successful novel, all in the hands of a great production team, a brilliant director and a stellar cast. We're thrilled it's shaping up so wonderfully."

Night Train recruited a who's who of European actors: Bruno Ganz, Jack Huston, Melanie Laurent, Martina Gedeck, Lena Olin, August Diehl, Beatriz Batarda, Burghart Klaussner, Christopher Lee and Charlotte Rampling. All will be speaking English with Portuguese accents.

Studio Hamburg and C-Films partnered with Portuguese producers Ana Costa and Paulo Trancoso of Cinemate for their local expertise. Russ says: "They are a very serious production company that has been around a long time, so we speak the same language. We all trust each other."

For August, it is something of a homecoming, as he shot *The House Of The Spirits* (also starring Irons) in Lisbon 19 years ago. Of *Night Train*, he says: "That's the fun part of showing not only Lisbon, but sides of Lisbon that have not been shown before."

After shooting the initial scenes in Bern, 90% of the film shot in Lisbon and surrounding areas. Portugal does not have a rebate like other European territories but the government pulled out the stops to help the film get made, with backing from several bodies including the City of Lisbon, the mayor's office and the Department of Treasury.

Logistically, the team has pulled off some challenges. "There are 75 people in the crew, and that's not easy travelling in our streets, and there are some days with three different locations," Costa says proudly.

Ross adds: "We haven't had any issues logistically. There are well-trained crews and good locations."

A fruitful partnership

C Films and StudioHamburg are also collaborating on another project, *Simple*, adapted from Marie-Aude Murail's 2007 novel about a boy and his brother who has learning difficulties. Markus Goller will direct. Ross says: "The co-operation for both companies is very important because it allows us to make projects which are bigger and more international, and both companies fit together perfectly. It's a very fair partnership."

Meanwhile, August has also completed his first Danish production since *Pelle The Conquerer* in 1988: *Marie Kroyer*, a drama about the unhappy marriage between Marie Kroyer and painter PS Kroyer [In Cannes, Svensk sold that film to Greece (Hollywood) and to CIS (Cinema Prestige).]

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