

EFM 2024: The buzz titles from the Americas

BY **JEREMY KAY** | 14 FEBRUARY 2024

Screen highlights the buzz titles ready to entice international buyers at the 2024 European Film Market (EFM), which runs February 15-21.



SOURCE: BERLIN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL
'SMALL THINGS LIKE THESE'

Lionsgate International will launch talks in Berlin on two films available for the world, inherited from Lionsgate's acquisition of eOne. Last month's Sundance premiere *Freaky Tales* from Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck (*Captain Marvel*, *Half Nelson*) stars Pedro Pascal, and brings four connected stories set in Oakland in 1987 involving teen punks, a rap duo, a weary henchman and an NBA all-star. Cosima Spender's documentary *Andrea Bocelli: The Man I Believe* charts the life of the Italian tenor.

FilmNation will engage with international buyers on Tim Mielants' Berlinale opener *Small Things Like These*, starring man of the hour Cillian Murphy, Oscar-nominated for *Oppenheimer*. The 1985-set drama follows a devoted father and coal merchant who discovers shocking secrets in the local convent. The slate includes *Treasure*, Julia Von Heinz's film about an American music journalist who takes a trip to Poland in the 1990s with her Polish father, a Holocaust survivor. Lena Dunham and Stephen Fry star, and FilmNation and Bleecker Street partner on the global release.

Voltage Pictures will be talking up *The Roughneck*, Kyle Rankin's revenge thriller starring Austin North from the *Beautiful* franchise as an oil-rig worker who enlists the help of his estranged convict father, after he is assaulted on a cross-country journey to his wedding. Holt McCallany, who played the patriarch in *The Iron Claw*, also stars.

A24 is understood to be launching talks on *The Materialists*, a romantic comedy reuniting the studio with *Past Lives* filmmaker Celine Song. Dakota Johnson, Chris Evans and Pedro Pascal are circling the story of a high-end matchmaker. Killer Films and 2AM produce.

WME Independent will be talking up action thriller *Normal*, with Ben Wheatley directing Bob Odenkirk as Ulysses, a man who is thrust into the temporary role of the sheriff of a small town with big secrets.

Yellow Veil's sci-fi horror comedy *The Becomers* tells of two body-snatching alien lovers who arrive separately on Earth, and jump from body to body in search of each other. Zach Clark directs and Isabel Alamin, Molly Plunk and Russell Mael star. Dark Star just acquired North American rights.

Concourse Media arrives with Brock Harris's period action revenge title *Cottonmouth* starring Ron Perlman, Esai Morales and Martin Sensmeier. In post. Brad Watson's completed horror *I'll Play Mother* finds adoptive parents wondering if their two new children harbour a dark secret. Shubham Saraf, Jo Martin, and Susanne Wuest star.

Blacktop International kicks off talks on Quiver's thriller *The Girl In The Pool* starring Freddie Prinze Jr as a man who must endure a surprise birthday party thrown by his wife, just after disposing of the corpse of his mistress. Dakota Gorman directed and Quiver is eyeing a second-quarter North American release.

Neon International will be introducing buyers to Steven Soderbergh's ghost story *Presence*, fresh from its world premiere in Sundance last month, where the filmmaker made his first return as director since his 1989 breakout *sex, lies, and videotape*. Lucy Liu, Julia Fox and Chris Sullivan star in the story of a family who realise they are not alone in their new suburban home. Sugar23 produced and David Koepp (*Jurassic Park*) wrote the screenplay. The slate includes psychological drama *The Housewife*, to star Naomi Watts, Tye Sheridan, Michael Imperioli and Norman Reedus. The story centres on a journalist tracking down a suspected former Nazi officer in New York who encounters the man's charming wife. Principal photography is set to begin in June and CAA Finance represents US rights.

The Exchange will launch worldwide sales on romantic comedy *Worth The Wait* starring Lana Condor (*To All The Boys I've Loved Before* franchise), Andrew Koji (*Bullet Train*) and Ross Butler (*Shazam!* franchise). Tom Shu-Yu Lin directs the story about the relationships of Asian-American strangers over the course of a year against the backdrops of Seattle and Kuala Lumpur. In post.

Visit Films will be talking up Amos Gitai's Berlinale Special selection *Shikun*, starring Irene Jacob and inspired by Eugene Ionesco's allegorical play *Rhinoceros*, which explores the emergence of totalitarianism through a series of theatrical episodes in a single Israeli building. Jeremy Thomas is executive producer. The slate includes Sundance entry *Ghostlight*, which was acquired by IFC Films and Sapan Studio for North America and follows a grieving construction worker who joins a local theatre's production of *Romeo And Juliet*. Kelly O'Sullivan and Alex Thompson co-directed.

Palisades Park Pictures is introducing buyers to *The Magic Faraway Tree*, based on Enid Blyton's book about children in a new country home who discover a magical tree. Ben Gregor will direct, and Pippa Harris and Nicolas Brown of Neal Street Productions produce alongside Danny Perkins of Elysian Film Group. CAA Media Finance co-represents US rights. The slate includes *Skyline Radial* and *Skyline Warpath*, Liam O'Donnell's upcoming instalments in the sci-fi franchise. XYZ Films holds US distribution rights to the latter, which is filming in Indonesia and stars Iko Uwais from *The Raid* franchise alongside Scott Adkins (*Undisputed*).

XYZ Films launches worldwide sales on William Kaufman's sci-fi *Osiris* in which Special Forces commandos are abducted by a mysterious spacecraft and find themselves being hunted by an alien race. Max Martini, LaMonica Garrett, Brianna Hildebrand and Linda Hamilton from the *Terminator* franchise star. *Osiris* shot in New Orleans last year.

Highland Film Group will be in Berlin talking up the Josh Duhamel action comedy *London Calling* about a mediocre hitman who goes on the run and gets stuck in Los Angeles after mistakenly killing the relative of London's biggest crime lord. Allan Ungar, who directed Duhamel in heist thriller *Bandit*, recently wrapped production in South Africa. The slate includes Ben Brewer's SXSW official selection *Arcadian*, starring Nicolas Cage as a man trying to survive with his twin teenage sons in a post-apocalyptic world.

Arclight Films will be talking up *Deep Water*, Renny Harlin's survival thriller about plane passengers on a sinking plane in shark-infested waters. The production label is Simmons/Hamilton Productions, the collaboration between Arclight chairman Gary Hamilton and Kiss co-founder Gene Simmons.

Buoyed by a new investment from Los Angeles financier CaliWood Pictures to help grow its finance and production activities, **Fortitude International** arrives with *The Penguin & The Fisherman* starring Jean Reno in the story of DinDim, a penguin that travels thousands of miles each year to visit the Brazilian fisherman who rescued him. David Schurmann directed and producers are Robin Jonas, Steve Wegner, Patrick Ewald's Epic Pictures, Ocean Films and Schurmann Films. In post.



VMI International will be launching sales on Brendan Gabriel Murphy's completed psychological thriller *Fluxx* starring Tyrese Gibson and Shelley Hennig in the story of an actress trapped in a loop inside her Hollywood home; she is visited by two people claiming they can help her, and must decide whom to trust. Completed comedy *Chosen Family* stars Heather Graham as a yoga instructor who dates the father of a jealous seven-year-old. Graham directed and wrote the screenplay.

Pinnacle Peak Pictures kicks off the year with talks on *Forty-Seven Days With Jesus* in which a man's commitment to his family is tested. The cast includes Yoshi Barrigas and Catherine Lidstone from faith-based series *The Chosen*, the latest episodes of which opened theatrically at number two at the US box office. Emilio Palame and David M Gutel co-directed.

MPI Media Group brings Vin Arfuso's completed documentary *Walled Off*, about the titular hotel in Bethlehem designed by the elusive UK street artist Banksy. Producers are Anwar Hadid, Pink Floyd's Roger Waters, Kweku Mandela and Arfuso.

Cinema Management Group will be deep in talks on all territories excluding Latin America on Gonzalo Otero's supernatural thriller *The Devil's Teardrop*, in post. The feature shot in the Andes in Peru and follows a team of ecologists documenting illegal mining in a forest said to be inhabited by a mythical being. CMG is also hosting the world premiere screening of animated family adventure *Panda Bear In Africa* from the producer of *Ainbo: Spirit Of The Amazon*.

Utopia will be introducing Julie Pacino's feature directorial debut *I Live Here Now* to international buyers. Lucy Fry (*Vampire Academy*), Madeline Brewer (*The Handmaid's Tale*), Matt Rife (*Natural Selection*) and Sheryl Lee (*Twin Peaks*) star in the psychological horror about a woman trapped in a hotel where the violent echoes of her past come alive, blurring nightmare and reality. The film is in post. Utopia's sales roster includes the sci-fi thriller *Divinity* from Eddie Alcazar, with Steven Soderbergh on board as executive producer.

Raven Banner arrives with Jesse Haaja's Finnish revenge saga *Rendel 2: Cycle Of Revenge* starring Kristofer Gummerus as the titular character who wages war against the Vala Corporation to avenge his family's death. Lawrence Jacomelli's feature debut *Blood Star* pits a woman against a crooked sheriff in a deadly game of cat and mouse that was shot in the desert near Los Angeles.

Jackrabbit Media has Stefan Colson's western *Ghosts Of Red Ridge* in post. The story of a haunted sheriff and his deputy battling outlaws stars Owen Williams, Trent Culkin and Griffin Wade. The Jackrabbit Studios production is produced by Jack Campbell, Rebecca Campbell, Mark Padilla and Colson. The line-up also includes Richard J Lee's horror film *The Death That Awaits*, about a drifter who accepts a job looking after a sick teenager who is undergoing a mysterious transformation.

Myriad Pictures are in Berlin talking to buyers on *The Throwback*, a comedy starring Justina Machado — the

of a "supermom" with two energetic kids and a lethargic husband, whose lives are upended when she

experiences a life-threatening situation at work. Mario Garcia directed the feature for Movie House Stories and Miantri Films.

FilmSharks will be talking up a restored version of Fabian Bielinsky's 2000 Argentinian crime classic *Nine Queens*, starring Ricardo Darin and Gaston Pauls as swindlers trying to score a big deal. The roster includes Lucia Puenzo's recent Göteborg and San Sebastian selection *Los Impactados* from Historias Cinematograficas, about a woman who awakens from a coma. Chilean actress Mariana di Girolamo stars.

Film Mode Entertainment arrives with two completed crime thrillers. Francis Galluppi's *The Last Stop In Yuma County* stars Jim Cummings in the story of a travelling knife salesman who walks unknowingly into a hostage situation at an isolated rest stop. *She's A Criminal* stars Shane West, Willa Holland and Dermot Mulroney in Matthew Yerby's tale of a desperate bartender who teams up with a thief on a heist.

Great Escape is kicking off talks on *Barron's Cove*, a crime thriller from Mandalay Pictures (*Air*) starring Garrett Hedlund, Stephen Lang and Brittany Snow. The project, which is in post, tells of a father with a history of violence who kidnaps a boy responsible for a horrendous crime. Evan Ari Kelman makes his feature directorial debut from his Black List screenplay.

Sublimity Entertainment holds worldwide rights to Hello Moment Productions' boxing drama *Uppercut*, about a female boxer turned manager who prepares her protégé for a big fight. Ving Rhames, Luise Grossmann, Jordan E Cooper and Joanna Cassidy star. Real Dreams Entertainment's adventure fantasy *The Last Redemption* stars Kevin Sorbo and Natalie Burn.

Premiere Entertainment Group will be talking up *Katie's Mom*, a romantic comedy loosely inspired by *The Graduate* in which a divorcee's holiday celebration with her adult children is derailed when she falls for her daughter's new boyfriend. Dina Meyer, Aaron Dominguez and Julia Tolchin star.

The Coven will be introducing buyers to completed horror *The Painted* starring Aleksa Palladino from *Boardwalk Empire* as a woman who inherits a curse. Sasha Sibley directed from her 2020 short of the same name. Michael Peterson's *Shadow Of God* is in post and stars Mark O'Brien as a veteran exorcist.

Bleiberg International has *Mob Cops*, which just wrapped production and stars David Arquette, Jennifer Esposito and Jamie-Lynn Sigler in the story of an investigation to apprehend two corrupt policemen who carried out assassinations and other crimes for New York crime families in the mid-1980s to 1990s. Danny A Abeckaser directs.

Blue Fox Entertainment holds international rights to young-adult romantic comedy *Boot Camp*, based on Gina Musa's Wattpad webnovel of the same name, about a girl who signs up for an intense summer course to reinvent herself and falls for her personal trainer. Mackenzie Munro directed, and Rachel Boudwin and Emmanuelle Chriqui star. Blue Fox will show first footage from *Lost On A Mountain In Maine*, Andrew Boodhoo's survival thriller about a 12-year-old boy who gets separated from his family in a huge storm.

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