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## Mike Downey and Sam Taylor

18 August, 2011 | By Sarah Cooper

**F&ME producers Mike Downey and Sam Taylor talk about the new projects on their slate, plans for expansion and why having an international outlook is the key to their success.**



Mike Downey and Sam Taylor launched their London-based production company Film & Music Entertainment in 2000.

Downey and Taylor are constantly looking at ways to innovate and diversify with plans to launch their own EIS scheme with a venture capitalist, work with more female directors and strengthen the brand through ongoing deals with companies including Molinare, Content Film (for sales) and Sony (for non-theatrical rights). A music deal with Atlantic Screen for the complete F&ME catalogue is also in the process of being finalised as is a deal with HB Films to publish a box set of 10 of F&ME's European co-productions under the title Cinema Without Frontiers.

With a focus on nurturing new talent and building a portfolio of films across genres and countries, the dynamic duo, backed by F&ME's chair Stephen Daldry, are also expanding their partnerships into Brazil, India and New Zealand, with the aim of making up to six films a year.

They are currently working with long time collaborator Julien Temple on his latest project *Children Of The Revolution* which has just started shooting in Rio and is being funded by the Rio State Cultural Fund, as well as Sergio Sa Leitao's Rio Filmes. The film is a co-production with TV Zero and is being sold internationally by Ealing Metro International.

Also shooting is Peter Greenaway's *Goltzius And The Pelican Company* in Croatia, whilst Dominic Murphy's latest feature *Cassy and Jude* and Antonia Bird's *Cross My Mind* are both in pre-production.

The pair are teaming up with acclaimed director Pawel Pawlikowski for his next project, a film set in an obscure location, which has BFI funding and a high-profile cast.

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And also in development is a feature based on the book by Shrabani Basu about the true story of Noor Inayat Khan, the only Muslim Sufi female secret agent to win the George Cross.

**You are celebrating your 11th birthday this year..what's the secret of your longevity?**

Mike Downey: The overall secret is, like with any business, you need a mixed portfolio. As filmmakers we have always looked to other ways of making films because it's a very difficult job and you have to put so much of your energy, time and life into it. It's something that you've got to really want to do, and we really like making films.

**One of the things that marks you out from other UK companies is your focus on co-productions and on films with international appeal..**

Downey: There has always been a separation in the UK between UK films and co-productions. Well, everything is a co-production, so I'm not sure why we divide it up. People on the smart money always find collaborations with excellent partners in other countries to mitigate their downside and to maximize their upside.

Sam Taylor: In TV they do it all the time, but they don't call them co-productions. It's nothing unusual, what we do, but for some reason people like to put a label on it. Co-producing gives us more options. It gives us more places to find money. We like working with European talent. We kind of think of ourselves as a European company in the UK.

Downey: If you hve a mixed portfolio you can do all this interesting stuff with interesting film-makers, you can then put your own in house films on a very slow burn, because you are not desperate enough to force them into production without them being fully mature.

**Are you always looking for new countries to co-produce with?**

Taylor: We are still working with our old partners, like we are shooting Peter Greenaway's film in Croatia at the moment. We have had very good experiences shooting in Eastern Europe. But we've been looking at other co-production places because we are finding that with our traditional partners it's becoming more difficult because we simply can't match what they can find locally.

Downey: We have been working with New Zealand, South Africa, Brazil and India. These are all production powerhouses which have an enormous amount of resources but are developing a very smart sense of taste and ways of bringing non domestic films into their domestic marketplace in a profitable kind of way. Brazil is the seventh economy in the world, it's got the highest amount of people coming out of poverty than any other developing nation.



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Taylor: It feels very lively, which, without putting down the UK, can feel a bit depressed. But the trend is that a lot more Europeans want to shoot in the British language, in English. Especially in Scandinavia, they are becoming more used to that so that makes them more interested in coming back to work into the country.

**You like to nurture strong relationships with directors like Julien Temple and *White Lightning* director Dominic Murphy. Tell us about his next film, *Cassy And Jude*.**

Downey: It's our flagship project of the next 12 months. A romantic comedy of errors set in Wales about two identical twin sisters, one who wants to get married and the other who thinks she is throwing away her life.

The budget is \$6m and we are also partnering up with New Holland Films in New Zealand, because one of the characters is from New Zealand. Content are selling it. We are casting at the moment with a view to starting in November. The lead will play both parts, which makes the casting process more exciting. It's one of those roles where it's an enormous challenge and a potentially career changing turn.

Taylor: We will probably go with someone quite established. It's really interesting seeing the young British actors who are out there.

Downey: We have a company with Dominic, Mass Productions. We are developing a film with him for Channel 4 based on Iain M Banks novels about his fictional futuristic universe where the dominant force is *The Culture*, called *A Gift from the Culture*, which is at script development stage.

**What about other European directors?**

Downey: We have repeat relationships with our European directors that we work with like Antonio Nuic and Andrzej Jakimowski.

Taylor: We can help them get to the talent here. Sometimes people phone from Europe and they get short shrift with the agents. They know us, so we can cut through that.

Downey: And they bring us totally unique stories that probably wouldn't have been conceived by an Anglo director. Like Andrzej Jakimowski's *Blind Watching* [working title. It has just finished shooting]. It is set in a blind school in Lisbon where the entire cast is blind, only the two lead actors Alexandra Maria Lara (*Control*) and British actor Edward Hogg are wearing prosthetic eyes. It's an English-language film, a fable that would have a hard time coming to the screen in an entirely Anglo-centric environment. He has got a highly original way of looking at things in this world where everything is becoming more and more homogenised.

**Documentaries seem to be an increasingly important part of your slate.**

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Downey: When you start out in filmmaking you see it as a vehicle for championing ideas, changing the world. With fiction I think that has become harder and harder and with docs it has become more and more possible to take on an issue and for that thing to have a very quick and immediate impact.

Like *Turtles' Song*, which opened in the US and has become a permanent feature at all of the Seaworlds across America. It had already sold all over the world, we made it for £1.6m, which is quite a big amount for a doc but we managed it quickly.

On the back of *Streetkids United* in Africa in the run up to the World Cup, we are now planning *Streetkids United 2* for the Brazil World Cup, a story embedded with the Brazilian team. And we want to widen out to cover the other international teams in advance.

#### **You are launching your own EIS scheme in response to the changes in law?**

Downey: We are working with a major venture capital company to create our own EIS scheme for both film and television. On the film side we want to create a £10m fund. The idea of the first film fund is to fully fund two £5m films. It will launch in the autumn and the first films will be made in 2012.

Taylor: We are forever going to funds for money, so we thought why don't we start our own. If we can cut out the middle man, that would be great.

#### **What are your aims for the next 10 years?**

Taylor: We would like to start making films on slightly bigger budgets just because change is always good. We will work more with India and Brazil. And I would like to work with more women directors because we are still not seeing enough. I think there is a shift in the audience. It has always been about the 15- to 25-year-old males but I think that is changing.

Downey: Our aim is to be an independent producer in the true sense of the word. We want to create a solid production base with a mixed portfolio of film genres backed up by a judicious development policy, strong in house financing, powerful production capacity and outlets for the exploration of our 40-film back catalogue.

And if in 10 years time we are still sitting here talking about working with great directors, working on brilliant ideas and hopefully making some kind of contribution to a change in the way we think about things then I'll be happy!

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