

SCREEN AFRICA

MONTHLY NEWS ON BROADCAST, FILM, COMMERCIAL, NEW MEDIA & TECHNOLOGY WWW.screenafrica.com VOL 22 - SEPTEMBER 2010 R32.00

CT Film Studios snares major film

The brand new multimillion rand Hollywood-style studio complex, Cape Town Film Studios (CTFS), officially opens its doors in September to host production on *Judge*

Loss and gain at Waterfront

Post-production veteran Mike Smit's resignation as managing director of Waterfront Studios at the end of July came as a surprise to the industry.

Smit started in television at the SABC in the early 1970s and went on to establish the leading post production facility Video Lab in Blairgowrie, Johannesburg. In the early 1990s he sold Video Lab to the stock exchange listed Sasani Group (it has since delisted).

More than seven years ago Smit left the corporate environs of Sasani and migrated to Cape Town where he joined with Dutch-based chairman and CEO of Condor International Rob Meddens, to establish Condor Cape the parent company of

— to page 42

Dredd, a 3D live action international feature film produced by DNA Films (*Trainspotting*, *The Beach*, *The Last King of Scotland*).

CTFS CEO Nico Dekker says that the studio complex was not originally scheduled to be fully operational as early as September. "So we have been through quite an intense process to get ready for *Judge Dredd*. A core team from DNA Films has been here since 23 August and we've been working around them, laying cables, putting in roads and landscaping the backlot. It's been a fantastic process and I'm grateful for the trust that DNA Films has put in us.

Proposals flood new channel

Mzansi Magic, the black-skewed local content channel recently launched on DStv by pay-TV broadcaster M-Net, has received a huge response to its first ever commissioning briefs.

The channel has until 15 November to select new projects and plans to start airing new programmes in the second half of 2011. Genres included in the briefs are a 13 x 48-min drama series; a daily

soap; a 13 x 24-min comedy show; a 13 x 48-min reality show; and 52 'bubblegum movies' (movies produced in the Nollywood style for a budget of R90 000 each).

All filmmakers commissioned for the bubblegum movies will retain DVD rights to their films for two years. In addition, Mzansi Magic will provide scripting workshops for the selected film projects. These workshops will be run by renowned scriptwriter Mtutuzeli Matshoba (*Yizo Yizo*, *Jerusalema*, *Chikin Biznis*).

Says channel manager Lebone Maema: "We are very

— to page 43

They will use most of the 17 000 square metres we have available, including our four sound stages."

The American co-producer on *Judge Dredd*, Michael S Murphey (supervising producer on the South African megahit *District 9*), says that DNA Films, like many European companies, was interested in exploring South Africa as a possible location.

"At first they considered Johannesburg but there were concerns about where the studio shoot would take place. The next logical step was to investigate Cape Town Film Studios. I'm not exaggerating



READY FOR ACTION: Cape Town Film Studio's CEO Nico Dekker inside Stage 1.

Content development fund

A South African fund that develops southern African content stories for feature films has been established. The fund provides finance and investment in promising projects.

Aptly named 'Once Upon a Story' (OUAS), the fund focuses on projects that may possibly attract foreign and local finance and have the potential to sell in local and international markets.

Key players in OUAS are fund director Paul Raleigh, Janine Eser, head of development and Leigh Pretorius, project coordinator.

"Paul and I initially discussed something like OUAS when we were at the

Oscars together in 2006 for *Tsotsi*," says Eser, script editor and associate producer on the Academy Award winning movie *Tsotsi*.

"We were enjoying the heady feeling and it felt great to be so proud of the film. There was also a very positive attitude towards the future of South African film and African film in general. But we were both aware of the work that had gone into the *Tsotsi* screenplay, and felt concerned how the industry at home could capitalise on that success without significant development funding."

At the time Eser, who lives in Los Angeles, was working in development for a US company and went on leave to

— to page 43

blade

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when I say it's one of best studios I've ever seen anywhere in the world," he explains.

DNA Films producer Andrew MacDonald adds: "Our film is not location specific and could have been made in any country in the world. The affordability of South Africa as a film destination and the new high tech Cape Town Film Studios provided us with the ideal combination."

Principal photography on *Judge Dredd* commences on 15 November and will be completed by the end of February 2011. Background plates and second unit footage will be shot in Johannesburg.

"We're all very excited about the prospect of shooting in 3D and are presently evaluating different 3D camera systems," notes Murphey. "As *Judge Dredd* is a European motivated project a good number of crew members will come from overseas but we are very keen to also use local crew. I think *District 9* proved that South African crew are world class. Post-production will take place in Europe."

Judge Dredd will be directed by Pete Travis (*End Game, Vantage Point*) with set design by Mark Digby (*Shumdog Millionaire*). The DOP is Oscar winner Anthony Dod Mantle (*Shumdog Millionaire*). Karl Urban (*Star Trek*) is cast in the lead role.

Dekker is delighted that CTFS will be occupied from its first official day of operation. "It's quite something to have attracted such a major film to our studio, especially in this harsh economic climate.

Judge Dredd is a particularly exciting project in that it is a 3D live action film, something that has never been done in South Africa before. The producers estimate that their South African spend will be in the region of \$20m, which will obviously have a huge multiplier effect on the local economy.

"When I started working on the CTFS venture two years ago many people told me that it wouldn't work and that I'd be left with a white elephant that no-one would want to use. My biggest goal was to provide South Africa with a world class studio and that goal has been

met. The two owners of the studio complex, Marcel Golding of Sadibo Investments and Anant Singh of Videovision Entertainment, deserve a lot of credit for taking on a high risk project in the middle of a recession. They have been unbelievably supportive during this journey."

CTFS has been fielding a number of enquiries from the likes of Disney, Warner Bros., Marvel and Universal.

The official opening of the studio in October marks the end of the first phase of the CTFS project, which saw the construction of four sound stages, multi-purpose workshops, art departments, make-up rooms, wardrobe rooms, star rooms, production offices, green rooms and storage spaces.

Phase two consists of securing film industry-related tenants for extensive office space to be built within the studio compound. Dekker has received over a hundred expressions of interest from film and new media companies wanting to move into the CTFS complex, which is situated 20 minutes from Cape Town's city centre. 📍

Content development fund

have her first child, so the idea of a development fund was put on the backburner. "But Paul was persistent as always," she continues. "He discussed the idea with Helen Kuun and Isabel Rao at Ster-Kinekor and they became great champions of the idea and with their backing we started work in earnest in 2008."

Projects are mainly found through word of mouth and it is important to emphasise that OUAS is not a training programme, but a meticulous development fund for screenwriters who have already written a full length screenplay, and who are well versed in the technical skills of screenwriting.

"We simply do not have the manpower to read a million submissions from young writers who need advice," says Eser.

"We only read submissions that are either correctly formatted full-length screenplays or presented as synopses with underlying material that are accompanied by a full length screenplay writing sample.



GOLDEN MOMENT –

Terry Pheto, Janine Eser and Presley Chweneyagae at the Oscars

"The writers go through a very intense and rigorous development process. OUAS does not merely provide funds for writing. I work very closely with the writers and my

expectations are high: our writers must give their full commitment to the process."

The R200 000 writing fee takes the form of a step deal over 48 weeks, which includes

Proposals flood new channel

happy and grateful to have received such an amazing response from the industry to our briefs. An entire wall in my office is piled high with proposals. We will notify the producers of selected projects by the end of November. It is likely that some of the commissioned programmes will go into production early in 2011."

Prior to the launch of Mzansi Magic, Maema conducted intensive research into the DStv subscriber universe. "This was to assess the viability of launching a new channel aimed at DStv's black viewers. What we found was surprising – black subscribers on DStv's entry level bouquet, Compact, were watching the free-to-air channels on SABC and e.tv because that's where the local content was.

"The only DStv channels they were watching were Africa Magic, which comprises solely of Nollywood movies and SuperSport. This clearly showed that local content is king. So we felt it was important that M-Net has a channel that offers local content in all genres."

Maema worked on developing a business model for Mzansi Magic with the director of Special Interest Channels, Yolisa Phahle. Says Maema: "I consulted widely with film organisations and film schools to assess the depth of their library content. What I found was that because the local industry has traditionally been commission-based, production companies don't have their own libraries.

"Years ago I met an inspiring Nigerian filmmaker called Amaka Igwe who said that Nollywood produces hundreds more films annually than South Africa because they work with low budgets of \$100 000. Nollywood has turned out to be hugely successful, not only in Nigeria but in the rest of Africa.

"Lately I've seen many local producers who own digital cameras produce their own low budget films. As a result we've seen the emergence of Vendawood (where films are produced for R40 000 each and profits are recouped in the Venda province). Similarly in Soweto there is Sollywood and Joziwood in Johannesburg. There is also the Nigerian / South African collaboration – Jollywood. Hence the logic behind the bubblegum movie concept is to make the film as cheaply as possible, sell it as quickly as possible and make the next one as soon as possible."

In addition to the commissioned shows and films, Mzansi Magic will also screen local classics like *White Wedding, Jerusalem, Mapantsula* and *Soweto Green*, as well as local documentaries, music specials and short films.

Maema stresses that M-Net didn't want Mzansi Magic to be just a licensing channel which is why it will regularly issue commissioning briefs. "We're positioning the channel as a 'Proudly South African entertainment channel'. While our target audience is the LSM 5-8 black market, the channel is actually for any South Africans who aren't blinkered."

Mzansi Magic went on air on 12 July with three new local shows – *Culture Shock* (a reality show featuring unique situations such as a white Afrikaans family going to live in a township); *Redi*, a talk show with well known journalist Redi Direko; and the music show *Top Ten at 10: My Life in Music*, hosted by Thabo 'T-Bose' Mokwele. 📍

writing and reading time. Projects currently in development include *Sweet Black Water, The Operator, Fanie Fourie's Lobola* and *Pinky Pinky*.

The standard writer's contract is applied to all

projects unless otherwise approved, and applications are assessed on their creative and commercial merits. OUAS attempt to inform all applicants whether they will fund their projects or not. 📍