



Timeless Films' *Wickie and the Treasure of the Gods* is Germany's first live-action 3D production.

3D's Next Dimension

After a hit and miss year at the box office, the global film industry will be closely watching how the format fares in Berlin *By Georg Szalai*

INDUSTRY OBSERVERS WILL be looking closely at the Berlin Film Festival and European Film Market — the first film market of the year for independents — to gauge the state of and outlook for 3D product sales. After all, U.S. film industry watchers have been discussing signs of 3D fatigue, even though in many parts of the world 3D continues to do well.

Buyers around the globe have generally been cautious though given economic and industry challenges, such as the Euro crisis and continued digital migration of the entertainment sector. Some observers say that the same caution is also playing into bets on 3D fare.

Market watchers surveyed by *THR* expect the Berlin market to show a steady appetite for the right kind of 3D releases. In a possible sign for the world's continuing, but somewhat more sober and rational appetite for 3D fare, there were 24 films in the format scheduled to be screened at the European Film Market in Berlin as of late January, a figure that could still change out of 748 films overall.

That would be slightly fewer than the 29 such movies last year, out of 741 total. For 2011, that meant a near-tripling of 3D entries over 2009, leading to expectations of another increase this year that didn't materialize.

"There hasn't been the 3D boom many expected two to three years ago," says Beki Probst, director of the European Film Market. "But don't blame 3D, blame the films. If people think any cheap horror film will work just because you do it in 3D, they will find out better at the market. If a film is to be in 3D it has to be something special. Audiences that watch 3D movies that are just so-so come out very disappointed. *Hugo* or *Pina* — these were wonderful, visual experiences that justified the extra cost of the 3D ticket."

In a venue change that will accommodate more industry screenings, EFM will this year screen 3D movies at the slightly larger CineStar Event movie theater in Berlin's Sony Center, which seats 350, instead of the Astor Film Lounge with about 250 seats.

Sellers agree that the quality and commerciality of product and region of release play into the success of a film and are therefore more important criteria for foreign buyers than whether a movie comes in 3D.

"As long as the film is commercial and has a wide U.S. release, that is much more important to them than 3D, which can be difficult at times when you can't get it into cinemas and must compete with the studios," explains Christian Mercuri, president of Red Granite International, which has a couple of projects going to Berlin.

The reliable horror genre will be repped at the EFM by veteran Italian shock specialist Dario Argento's *Dracula 3D*, as well as the latest in the venerable *Night of the Living Dead* franchise called *Re-Animation*.

Other 3D titles vying for attention at this year's market include the Korean mystery *A Fish*, the Japanese suspense film *Tormented*, as well as such animated titles as *The Snow Queen* from Russia, Iceland's *Legends of Valhalla: Thor, Outback 3D* and *Cinderella 3D*,

an animated take on the classic tale set in the Wild West.

Independent film distributor Vantage Media International is taking a slightly different approach by bringing two 3D films to EFM that couldn't be more different from one another. "The two are apples and oranges, but we think both work," says Howard Brodsky, acquisitions & development director of the company.

First is the Canadian zombie comedy *Dead Before Dawn 3D*, which the company insists is the first zombie film shot entirely in stereoscopic 3D. The film sees Christopher Lloyd battling "Zemons" — half zombies and half demons.

After showing some first scenes at AFM in Santa Monica late in 2011, a full screening "will help us show the effect," predicts Brodsky.

Vantage's second 3D film in Berlin is the Polish production *Battle of Warsaw 1920* from writer-director Jerzy Hoffman. "This is an epic war film, and 3D lends itself to epic action," explains Brodsky. "It comes very naturally."

4 HOT 3D TITLES IN BERLIN

The European Film Market will see a couple dozen 3D films vie for buyers' attention this year, most in the core 3D genres of action, martial arts, horror and animation. Here is a look at a handful of highly-anticipated 3D releases on offer in Berlin.

TORRENTE 4

The latest in the Spanish action comedy franchise from writer-director-star Santiago Segura broke Spanish box office records with its opening weekend take of \$11 million. Tagline: 'The masterpiece of earthy films.'

STREET DANCE 2

The U.K. dance drama revolves around a male street dancer who, after suffering humiliation by dance crew invincible, gathers the best dancers from around the world for a rematch. Star Falk Hentschel, who looks like a German version of Vin Diesel, is a trained dancer and has also appeared in episodes of *CSI*, *NCIS: Los Angeles* and *The Closer*.

WICKIE AND THE TREASURE OF THE GODS

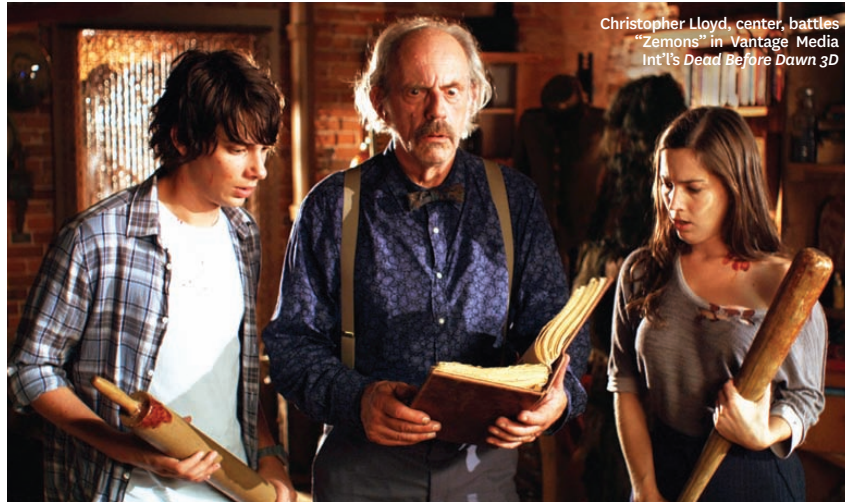
The Viking adventure-comedy from writer-director Christian Ditter is based on the popular 70s era animated kids series in Germany about a young Viking boy who often helps his father — the chief of his village — and his bumbling men with his brain, not his brawn.

LEGENDS OF VALHALLA: THOR

Don't confuse Iceland's most expensive film with the Marvel-Paramount movie. The Nordic country's first-ever animated feature, from animation house Caooz, tells the story of an over-confident teen with a magical hammer who joins forces with some imperfect gods to fight against an evil queen and her army of giants.

DEAD BEFORE DAWN 3D

Distributor Vantage Media International says the Canadian zombie comedy from director April Mullen and writer Tim Doiron is the first zombie film shot entirely in stereoscopic 3D. What's more, it sees Christopher Lloyd battling 'Zemons' — half zombies-half demons — after college kids accidentally unleash an evil curse.



Christopher Lloyd, center, battles 'Zemons' in Vantage Media Int'l's *Dead Before Dawn 3D*

Observers will keep a close eye on international buyers in Berlin to see if they show any changes in interest in 3D movies.

"There has definitely been a more robust appetite for 3D abroad and for large formats like Imax," says James Marsh, Wall Street analyst at Piper Jaffray.

"In the U.S., studios, exhibitors and technology firms all believe in 3D, but consumers haven't fully bought in. Consumers are still scratching their head, trying to figure out which movies are worth the \$3 price premium. I read about 3D fatigue in the U.S., but I don't think it applies to the international business at least not yet," adds Mimi Steimbauer, a former president of Hyde Park International who just founded her own international sales firm Radiant Films International and runs it as president and CEO. "If you look at the box office, they are performing very well. But buyers in general these days are looking more closely at whether 3D is necessary and really enhances a film. And the audience, as we have heard in the U.S., wants to see a 3D film where the 3D is a part of the storytelling, not just a film transformed into 3D so that people can be charged more."

In foreign markets though, up to 60 percent-plus of a film's box office comes from 3D, while that percentage lies at around 50 percent in the U.S. "There is no great answer, because there are fewer 3D screens per-capita overseas and less local-language

content. But the content they tend to go see, such as CG animated films and sequels, over-indexes abroad," says March.

Also, there have been more regular 3D and other tech innovations in the U.S. over the years. "The novelty of it wears off more quickly here," says Ted Garcia, managing director at PricewaterhouseCooper's U.S. entertainment, media and communications practice. "In other countries, this is all very new, and people are more accommodating."

While Hollywood studios are still the biggest purveyors of 3D fare, indies and big-name and auteur filmmakers have also started getting into the game.

"We're starting to see local content taking off" in such countries as the U.K., France, Spain, Australia and South Africa," says Garcia. Additionally, Martin Scorsese (*Hugo*), Wim Wenders (*Pina*) and Werner Herzog (*Cave of Forgotten Dreams*) have all released well-received 3D releases over the past year, and Baz Luhrmann's *The Great Gatsby* in 3D will hit theaters in December.

"What those projects demonstrate is that there is a significant difference between using 3D simply because it is the latest technology — and can generate more box office dollars, and using 3D in a genuinely expressive and substantive way," says Deron Albright, an independent filmmaker (*The Destiny of Lesser Animals*) who is also associate professor of film at Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia.

But the critical success of *Pina* and *Hugo* does not seem to have led to an increase in 3D auteur fare, at least no such effect is evident in the Berlin market lineup.

Some say that no one should expect that all auteurs will rush to 3D as a result of the recent releases by big names. "3D is still closely associated with spectacles," especially for kids, says Christopher Sharrett, professor of Communication and Film Studies at Seton Hall University.

"*Hugo* worked because it was aimed at a broad audience, but it appealed primarily to children. Films in 3D by [auteurs like] Michael Haneke, Lars von Trier and Claire Denis might cause a momentary thrill, but it is equally likely that the medium will hurt the credibility of these directors. 3D increases the 'wow' effect of a film, but it also tends to announce that the film has little serious substance."

Others have hope for more artistic 3D films in the future. "Using 3D for artistic reasons as opposed to just creating a spectacle" is becoming more important in the U.S. thanks to these releases, says 3D expert Ray Zone, who has written extensively about the format.

Brodsky expects his firm to be in for a learning experience that will help gauge current appetite for 3D fare it is bringing to Berlin.

Says Brodsky: "So far, it has been mostly studios in 3D, but now there are more indies, I feel." **TTR**