

## Keeping the Art of Storytelling Alive

# ZDF Enterprises' Coridass



Alexander Coridass first joined ZDF in 1985, working in the legal and business-affairs departments. In 1993, he moved to ZDF Enterprises, the newly formed commercial arm of the German public broadcaster. Since then he has been in charge of selling ZDF product around the world and also securing financing for major factual and fictional projects. Today, as president and CEO, his main priorities are providing the market with top-quality programs, nurturing relationships with clients, and empowering his staff to do the best they possibly can.

**By Anna Carugati** **TV EUROPE:** How has demand for German product changed?

**CORIDASS:** German product was the first [Continental European] programming that [was able] to travel worldwide in the late '80s. There was demand for our shows because we were the only ones producing long-running series with high production values, such as *Derrick*, *A Case for Tivo*, *The Old Fox*.

But in the beginning it was hard, because there was no tradition of exporting German entertainment, and people couldn't imagine acquiring German cop series. The U.S. and the U.K. had been selling feature films and TV product for a long time. In some French-speaking territories there was a longstanding tradition of detective movies and series. But for us, in the beginning, talking about German cop shows was like talking about Bulgarian wine! It was the Italians and the French who first dared to air German cop shows in prime time. And after their enormous success, it was much easier to open up other markets.

Today, we have much more than cop shows; we also have drama and family series. Our most important markets are still in Continental Europe, the ones who are used to our type of programs. Besides our broad offer of fiction programs, a very important and large part of our catalogue consists of documentaries, and as far as docs are concerned, the Anglo-Saxon countries are our most important partners.

ZDF Enterprises has become much more than a distribution entity. That's why we have to make clear certain distinctions between classic sales, cofinancing and co-productions.

**TV EUROPE:** You have co-produced extensively with some of the most important channels around the world.

**CORIDASS:** Absolutely, with the major U.S. channels like Discovery, The History Channel, National Geographic, but also with RAI in Italy, with French partners, with British partners such as Channel 4, with German-speaking broadcasters in Switzerland and also with Australia.

**TV EUROPE:** You have used reenactments in many of your documentaries.

**CORIDASS:** We have been at the forefront of reenactments. They are one of several legitimate techniques avail-

able to produce the best documentaries possible. We don't use them in every single documentary. Ten years ago there was a kind of purist faction [of filmmakers] who completely and absolutely opposed reenactments. Nowadays they are far

more accepted, and everybody says, when it makes sense and they are done well, reenactments are acceptable.

One of our most important developments of the past few years is that we have tried to prove that it is possible to produce top-quality programs, having the highest possible standards, in an interesting way. Telling stories is the key. Whether you are talking fiction or documentaries, people have always wanted to hear stories. They want to laugh, they want to cry. They want to know more. Stories were told by cavemen, and then in the medieval world, and even in Oriental bazaars—stories with a beginning and an end, and a climax, and with elements that people [can relate to] and can talk to their children and neighbors about.

We want to do that on both the fiction and the documentary sides—offer people interesting programs, produce them very professionally with the best standards, advisers, producers, but do it in a way that will not be boring.

**TV EUROPE:** What are some of the programs that have done well in the past?

**CORIDASS:** At the moment we are producing some documentaries [under the] working title *Super Docs*. One is called *Update 2056*, a three-part documentary which depicts the world in 50 years. It won't look at political scenarios or disaster forecasts but will examine what city life will be like. It will be based on scientific work, but told in a very entertaining way. For *Update 2056* we have U.S. and European partners. Another documentary is *Armageddon: The Longest Night*. This is a two-part program that looks at what will happen to the world when a comet hits.

Our history programs, such as *Hitler* and *Hitler's Henchmen*, are all very renowned shows. And *The Drama of Dresden* won an International Emmy for best documentary last year and was recently honored at the Shanghai Television Festival.

Fiction is still our most profitable market segment, and here we have the new ZDF cop series. They are very modern, very stylish cop shows, such as *Siska*, the follow-up to *Derrick*; *Cologne P.D.* and *Leipzig Homicide*. We have had success with Rosamunde Pilcher TV dramas, and we have a good reputation for thrillers. ■



**Wonder girls:** *H<sub>2</sub>O: Just Add Water*, about three teenage mermaids, is one of ZDF's big launches for MIPCOM.