

German drama made a global statement last year with *Deutschland 83*, but will the country's TV industry support further successes? Richard Middleton reports.



Kudamm 56 - Rebel With a Cause

Daring Deutschland

Old War caper *Deutschland 83* might have lit up German drama last year but despite its global success, questions remain over whether it's a flash in the pan or the start of a more fundamental scripted shift.

It's a strange paradox of the German market that while the RTL series and its hit-laden soundtrack went gangbusters around the world, domestic viewers seemed a bit nonplussed - making you wonder just what its long-term impact on the local German industry will be.

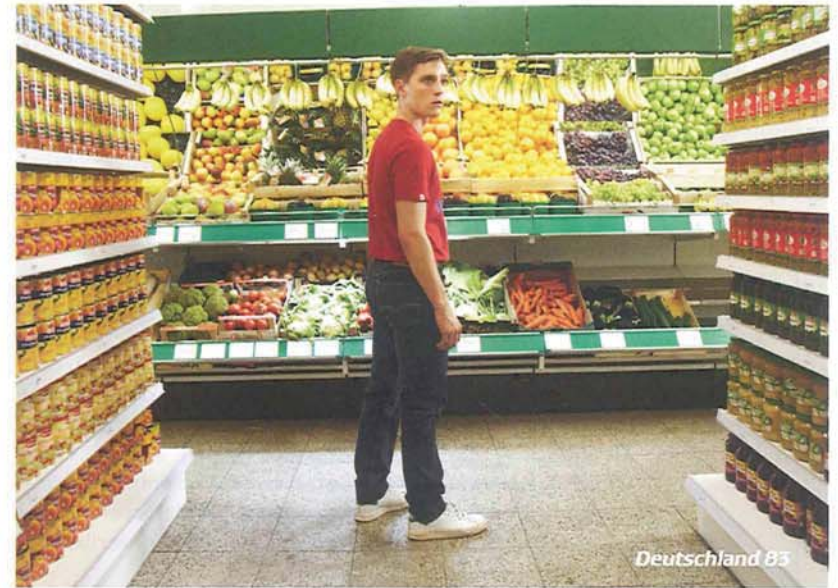
No matter through which prism you choose to look at Germany, it almost always appears as a global force. Yet its TV business has previously remained relatively staid, largely averse to pay TV and happy enough to churn out dramas - often in the form of TV movies - to fill regular, predictable slots that have worn deep ruts in the schedules. Shows such as detective drama *Tatort* and highway cop series *Alarm Für Cobra 11 - Die Autobahnpolizei* are still reliable stalwarts.

Edward Berger, director of *Deutschland 83*, admits the country has been "much slower" to join the global trend for premium drama, lagging behind not just the likes of the UK and the US but also smaller nations such as Norway, Sweden and Denmark.

"The programming slots and the traditions are much more rigid," says Berger, who was known for movies such as 2014's *Jack* prior to working on the UFA Fiction show. Critics, he adds, wondered why Denmark and Sweden could produce territory-defining drama while "a big market" like Germany often failed to make any international hit stick.

"German TV seems to be much more conservative but slowly there are little cracks opening up here and there because German broadcasters got a lot of flack for not opening up to this type of storytelling," he explains.

It's logical, of course, to lay the blame for Germany's lack of wider scripted success at the domestic channels' doors, yet they do report to their audiences. And when all's said



Deutschland 83

and done, RTL execs didn't hit the domestic ratings motherload with the Jorg and Anna Winger-penned *Deutschland 83* - so who could blame them for not taking similar risks in the future?

However, Germany's drama evolution may well be more nuanced

than it first appears, because *Deutschland 83* wasn't without precedent. UFA's *Generation War* debuted in 2013, claiming audiences of more than seven million when it aired on German pubcaster ZDF, and it also made its way to more than 100 countries. Nico Hofmann, ▶

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Sundance snags *Gomorra* for US

SundanceTV in the US has expanded its foreign-language drama offering after picking up the first two seasons of Italian crime series *Gomorra*.

The show is based on the bestselling book by Italian writer Roberto Saviano and tells the inside story of the Camorra, the fierce Neapolitan crime organisation. It is produced by Sky Atlantic and Italian prodcos Cattleya and Fandango, in association with La7 and German distributor Beta Film. Sundance, which has picked the show up from The Weinstein Company after it acquired US rights from

Beta last year, will air the first season this summer. Joel Stillerman, president of original programming and development for AMC and SundanceTV, said the latter channel "prides itself on presenting distinctive stories from unique points of view, and *Gomorra*'s gritty exploration of the Camorra mob families in Naples is no exception." *Gomorra* joins dark comic noir drama *Hap & Leonard*, crime series *The Last Panthers* and autism-focused *The A Word* on SundanceTV's 2016 scripted slate.

Beta has sold *Gomorra* to channels including Sky Germany, HBO Nordic in Scandinavia and HBO Latin America.

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Susanne Müller
Executive director,
Feature films, ZDF



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UFA's co-CEO, says it was "the first big turning point" and highlights that the importance of *Deutschland 83* – and the thing that "took us to the next level" – was its sale to SundanceTV in the US.

Some have argued it might have been the subject matter that resulted in the less-than-emphatic domestic ratings for *Deutschland 83*. But if that was the case, no one told the writers behind *The Same Sky*. The show, also from UFA and distributor Beta Film, is being made for ZDF and Czech TV and explores 1970s Berlin. The 6x60' series – with a budget of around €15m (US\$16.9m) – again uses the Cold War as its backdrop, putting a romantic spin on the spy storyline, with Oscar nominee Oliver Hirschbiegel directing.

Then there's *Babylon Berlin*, the unlikely matchmaker that brought together the German arm of pay TV broadcaster Sky and domestic pubcaster ARD, providing a clear example of free TV's ambitions.

Again, it's set to be a slick, expensive drama, based on Volker Kutscher's crime novels and with a budget estimated to be northwards of €40m. The series, airing on Sky in 2017 and ARD in 2018, is set in 1920s Berlin and explores a detective, gangsters and the period's political extremism.

It's being adapted by director Tom Tykwer, with X Filme – the prodco he owns with producer Stefan Arndt

– producing and Beta distributing.

Marcus Ammon, senior VP of film at Sky Deutschland, says the show has "very high potential to be a big success across Europe." And the fact the series secured a two-season order from the off, says Arndt, shows "how enthusiastic and confident" the project's partners are, while the show marks "the dawn of a new epoch in television production."

Beta director Jan Mojto is equally bullish about local productions, describing the Made in Germany tag as "a hallmark of quality." In a similar vein, he adds that *Babylon Berlin* has already received positive reaction from international execs and "doesn't need to take second stage to any of the major international series."

Distribution bosses might be expected to be overtly confident in the quality of product on their slate but the flurry of premium German fare coming out of local studios suggests the tide has turned, with the likes of ORF and ZDF joining with MR Film and Beta on epic period drama *Maximilian*, which centres on a battle for power in Europe during the 15th century.

Elsewhere, Fremantle Media-owned UFA is working on *Ku'damm 56 – Rebel With a Cause*, which was commissioned by ZDF and sales arm ZDF Enterprises. The show explores changing social structures during the 1950s and has been described by



Deutschland 83 director Edward Berger, Sky Deutschland's Marcus Ammon and UFA's Nico Hofmann

ZDFE president and CEO Alexander Coridass as "proof of the growing importance of German drama."

Berger, meanwhile, has turned to more contemporary matters for his next series, *The House*, which is from coproduction trio Atlantique Productions and Berlin-based originators Lupa Film and Port au Prince. It follows six characters living in different countries and the impact Europe's ongoing refugee crisis has upon them.

German public broadcasters SWR and Arte are already on board, as is Arte France, suggesting the blinkers are being removed and drama that pushes the envelope beyond the predictable cop procedural, in both subject and style, is forthcoming.

Indeed, Berger is clear his approach to *Deutschland 83* was to reimagine the traditional look of German TV. "It was a new type of storytelling and it was very important to shoot the series as a movie, not like a TV piece," he explains. "So it wasn't all close-ups, talking heads and dialogue but a lot of images and swift or different use of camera angles, cutting and music."

Al Munteanu, president and founder of German distributor SquareOne, also points out that the need for "diversity and more daring storytelling" has increased with the rise of such firms as Netflix and Amazon. "In this sense, the international interest in local German content has grown exponentially," he adds.

Netflix is working on its first German drama, *Dark*, with the team

behind 2006 Stasi movie *The Lives of Others*, while Amazon Prime has also ordered its first original German-language TV series in the form of *Wanted*. The show follows a Berlin professional who falls victim to a hacking attack, and is being produced by Pantaleon Entertainment, Warner Bros Entertainment and Warner Bros International TV Production Deutschland.

There's also the little matter of further pay TV growth, which is also set to ratchet up opportunities. Munteanu says their demands – and those of VoD services – tend to focus on "edgier, darker" material and that in turn is affecting domestic free TV output.

"Nonetheless, it's a tricky task to create new, riveting storytelling for a loyal audience that has been socialised to consume more traditional fare," he cautions. "All broadcasters are rightfully taking one careful step at a time, never losing sight of their core audience. It makes no sense to offer nouvelle cuisine when your restaurant is known for burgers."

Ammon adds that Sky is "embracing" online competition because all parties share a similar end goal – namely "better TV," something that free TV operators also seem intent on.

While *Deutschland 83* might not have been a direct hit locally, it has further fanned the flames of the German drama industry, turning what were flickers of interest into something altogether brighter. ■



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Chairman and joint CEO,
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FX gains Danny Boyle's Trust

US cable network FX has ordered a 10-part family drama that will be executive produced by *Slumdog Millionaire* and *Steve Jobs* director Danny Boyle.

Trust is based on the true story of Getty oil heir John Paul Getty III. The first episode is set in 1973, when the young Getty is kidnapped in Italy and his Mafia captors are seeking a multimillion-dollar ransom. The drama comes from executive producers Simon Beaufoy, Christian Colson and Boyle, who will direct the debut episode.

FX Productions, UK-based Cloud Eight Films, Decibel Films

and Snicket Films are attached as producers. FX, part of 21st Century Fox, signed a first-look production deal with Boyle and Colson in October 2014.

In related news, FX has extended its comedy series *Baskets* into a second season before the first has finished airing. *Baskets* was co-created by *The Hangover* actor Zach Galifianakis and comedian Louis CK, who won an Emmy for his work on FX show *Louie*.

The show, which debuted in January, follows the life of man who gets tired of the corporate world and decides to retrain to become a clown.