

Alive in Venice: British revival for film festival

Madonna's second movie also to be shown

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There will be a distinctly Anglophone feel to the 68th Venice Film Festival this year after a line-up heavy on British and American talent was announced in Rome yesterday.

The timing is serendipitous. Astonished by the huge commercial success of *Black Swan*, which premiered at Venice last year, and *The King's Speech*, which screened a few days later at the Telluride and Toronto film festivals in North America, Hollywood executives are desperate to find more modestly-budgeted, upmarket English-language films capable of delivering blockbuster sized takings at the box office.

Marco Müller, the director of the Venice Film Festival, known in Italy as "La Mostra", may have done their work for them this year, drawing up a selection that looks much more likely to play to mainstream audiences than the American film which won the Palme d'Or at Cannes two months ago: Terrence Malick's *Tree of Life*.

Mr Müller said yesterday that his selection "represents us better than the other editions and resembles the qualities and dynamics we would have always liked to capture". He added that American cinema was changing and "needs Venice [to showcase it]".

The contenders for Venice's Golden Lion (won last year by another American film, *Somewhere* by Sofia Coppola) include *Shame*, the second film by Steve McQueen, the British artist turned director who won widespread acclaim for *Hunger*, and a pair of British adaptations of classic British novels — Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* directed by Andrea Arnold and John Le Carré's *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* directed by Tomas Alfredson. They will be the first British films in competition in Venice for four years.

There are five American films, including star-studded offerings from George Clooney (whose political film *The Ides of March* opens the festival) and Todd Solondz as well as an equally glossy Canadian-German

co-production directed by David Cro-

nenberg. It means that well over a third of the 22 films in competition will be North American or British productions, and that's without counting the film that could well make the biggest noise on the Lido this year.

W.E. is an out-of-competition British film by an inexperienced director who just happens to have an enormous global following. Although Madonna has never enjoyed the same success on screen as she has in the music industry, and her 2008 directorial debut *Filth and Wisdom* received decidedly mixed reviews, even the more arthouse end of the film industry understands the need to drum up some excitement now and again and not many people in entertainment have a profile like Madonna's.

W.E. tackles the Abdication crisis from the point of view of Wallis Simpson. It has some outstanding actors on board in Andrea Riseborough, James Fox and Abbie Cornish.

Another out-of-competition film likely to pull in the crowds is Steven Soderbergh's *Contagion*, which stars Jude Law, Kate Winslet, Gwyneth Paltrow, Marion Cotillard and Matt Damon.

Other British performers expected in Venice this autumn are Colin Firth (who won a Best Actor award at the festival two years ago for *A Single Man*) and Gary Oldman, both starring in *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*, Keira Knightley and Michael Fassbender in Cronenberg's *A Dangerous Method*, an adaptation of the British writer Christopher Hampton's play *The Talking Cure* about the rivalry between the founding fathers of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, Carey Mulligan (who is in *Shame* with Fassbender again) and Kate Winslet, who is opposite Jodie Foster in Roman Polanski's *Carnage*, an adaptation of Yasmin Reza's hit play *God of Carnage*.

Away from the English language films there are hotly-tipped films from Greece, Israel, France, Russia and the Far East.

Darren Aronofsky, the director of *Black Swan*, is the chair of this year's jury. The festival runs from August 31 until September 10. Amanda Nevill, chief executive of the BFI, said that she

was "extremely proud" of the British films selected for Ven-

ice, as well as those selected for the Toronto and San Sebastián festivals this year. Terence Davies's *The Deep Blue Sea* is showing at San Sebastián and at Toronto. Arnold and McQueen's films will also be in Toronto along with Lynne Ramsay's *We Need to Talk about Kevin* (which was also in Cannes), Michael Winterbottom's *Trishna*, Peter Morgan's *360*, Pawel Pawlikowski's *Woman in the Fifth* and Mark Cousins's *The Story of Film*. "It's a worthy testament to the creativity and skill of British talent," Ms Nevill added.

