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Love and kisses from Hollywood

Marc Forster from the Canton of Grisons is flying high. The chameleon director of the 22nd Bond movie, *Quantum of Solace*, became a naturalised Swiss citizen in June 2008. Switzerland's man in Hollywood has managed the third-largest budget in the history of cinema. A profile of one of the most gifted moviemakers of his generation. By Alain Wey

"Everyone told me it was impossible to get into movie-making. But I'm doing it and I'm living my dream", says Forster. Switzerland's man in Hollywood has already directed stars as celebrated as Dustin Hoffman, Johnny Depp, Halle Berry, Kate Winslet, Heath Ledger and Emma Thompson. Naturalised as a Swiss citizen in June 2008, at 39 Marc Forster has become the youngest director of a Bond movie. With some surprise he reveals: "I used to only be interested in art house cinema, but I now find myself in charge of extremely commercial films." He has now mastered the mechanics of producing a blockbuster and is sure to make other action movies. Forster, from the Canton of Grisons, excels in comedy and drama,



Our man from Davos: Film Director Marc Forster

but has also made thrillers and horror movies. His work reflects a blend of genres while retaining a very distinctive individual style. This chameleon filmmaker, the only director of a Bond movie not to come from the Commonwealth, is from Switzerland like the spy himself who is half Swiss through his mother (Ian Fleming mentions this in the novel "You Only Live Twice"). Also a scriptwriter and a producer, Marc Forster has his own production team which he used on the latest Bond film. The spotlight on an American dream.

From Davos to Hollywood

Marc Forster is the youngest of three children and comes from a wealthy family. He left Germany with his parents to live in Klosters at a young age. From 1982 to 1990,

he was educated at the Institut Montana in Zugerberg, a boarding school for boys from Zug which includes John Kerry and Nicolas Hayek Jr. amongst its alumnae. His father, who was a doctor, was to lose his entire fortune following high-risk investments. In 1990, the young man from Grisons moved to New York to study cinema at New York University's Film School until 1993. He says: "I can see myself now in Zurich sitting on an aeroplane. I looked out of the window and saw that it had started to rain. I said to myself: 'Have I really just said goodbye to my whole life?' I didn't speak English very well and I didn't know any filmmakers. Generation after generation, everyone in my family had either been a doctor or a butcher. New York changed me

the moment I set foot there." He lived in a basement apartment that was cold and damp, but he felt "incredibly happy and a great sense of freedom". They were difficult times. His family was concerned by his stubbornness, but he refused to allow his reputation to be damaged. He now lives in Los Angeles. In 1998, the Forster family was hit by tragedy. His father died of cancer and his elder brother, who suffered from schizophrenia, committed suicide. Forster says: "These ordeals caused me great distress but did not break me. I was more determined than ever to pursue my dream."

Recognition

Forster's breakthrough finally came in 2000 with "Everything Put Together", which at-

tracted attention at the major independent film festivals in America. But it was with "Monster's Ball" that Marc Forster really conquered Hollywood. He explains: "This film changed my life." Halle Berry was awarded the Oscar for best actress and the full-length version was a box-office hit. The director has made seven films in just ten years. He says: "I have fulfilled my dreams, but I have discovered that each of them comes at a price. It is not by chance that all the characters in my films are locked within themselves and suffer emotional issues. Over the next decade, I would like to produce impassioned, extrovert films with characters daring to step forth and embrace the world."

Marc Forster completed the shooting of "Quantum of Solace" in under a year. The director was exhausted by the Bond adventure and will not be back immediately for a second film. If you look at the careers of the Bond directors, the risk is worth taking. While the producers already had him in mind for "Casino Royale", Marc Forster agreed to make the 22nd Bond movie after protracted negotiations. He even used his entire production team on the film and modified the screenplay to deepen the introspection of the character introduced in the previous film. There was also twice as much action, as the budget reached \$230 million this time compared to \$160 for the first film with Daniel Craig. It is the most expensive Bond film ever and the third most expensive film of all time behind Pirates of the Caribbean 3 and Spiderman 3. Was Forster's film a success? In less than a month, the film has brought in more than \$500 million worldwide and is on course to set a new record in box-office takings for a Bond movie.

One day Forster would like to return to Switzerland and to Davos. He says: "It is just a question of when." When reflecting on the next ten years, he speaks with the kind of profoundness often found in his films and also a hint of irony. He says: "I hope to be able to really open my heart to enhance my stories and my life. To do so, I will have to fight against my own reserved nature. It won't be easy, I am after all Swiss!"

MARC FORSTER "OFFICIALLY SWISS"

Background. Born on 27 January 1969 in Ulm, Germany. His father was a German doctor and his mother a Swiss architect. The family moved to Klosters in Grisons.

German-Swiss. On 28 June 2008, he obtained Swiss citizenship in Davos. To mark the occasion, a party was organised in the municipality in Grisons attended by Federal Councillor Moritz Leuenberger. Despite considering himself Swiss, speaking the Grisons dialect fluently and legally living in Davos, Marc Forster was officially still German. He says: "I love Switzerland. It is my country. I grew up there. It shaped my qualities and my faults. I was excited at the prospect of getting the passport. I am now officially Swiss and I am delighted as I believe the country has progressed in the right direction over the last decade."

(Le Temps, 9.11.2008)

First film seen at the cinema. Apocalypse Now by Francis Ford Coppola at the age of 12.

Do you think mankind is making progress? Mankind is constantly regressing and progressing. I believe that we are currently going through a progressive stage and that the resonance of mankind is soaring again. People are more aware of what is happening around them and I hope that future generations will have the resources and opportunities to introduce new ideas and really change things.

Next film. Marc Forster is making a horror thriller, adapting a novel by Max Brooks (son of Mel Brooks), World War Z. The screenplay conveys the accounts of the survivors of an invasion of zombies throughout the world. While no actors have been approached yet, it is understood that Brad Pitt's production company will finance the film. The director was enthused by the project. He says: "I've always been fascinated by this kind of film. When they told me about the storyline, it reminded me of the films from the 1970s with their paranoid conspiracies, like 'All the President's Men'."

FILMOGRAPHY AND AWARDS

- "Lounge". 1995, musical comedy, budget: \$100,000.
- "Everything Put Together". 2000, box office: \$3 million.
- "Monster's Ball". 2002, drama, budget: \$4 million, box office: \$44 million. With Billy Bob Thornton, Halle Berry (Oscar for best actress), Heath Ledger.
- "Finding Neverland". 2004, comedy drama, budget: \$25 million, box office: \$116 million, 7 Oscar nominations, won the Oscar for best film music. Laterna Magica Prize at the Venice Film Festival (2004). With Johnny Depp, Kate Winslet, Dustin Hoffman.
- "Stay". 2005, thriller, box office: \$8 million. With Ewan McGregor, Naomi Watts.
- "Stranger Than Fiction". 2006, comedy, budget: \$30 million, box office: \$54 million. With Will Ferrell, Dustin Hoffman, Emma Thompson.
- "The Kite Runner". 2007, drama, box office: \$73 million. Director of the Year at the Hollywood Film Awards.
- "B22: Quantum of Solace". 2008, budget: \$230 million, box office: more than \$500 million. With Daniel Craig.



British actor Daniel Craig, left, Ukrainian actress and model Olga Kurylenko, second from left, German-Swiss film director Marc Forster, second from right, and Swiss actor Anatole Taubman, right, pose during a photo call for the upcoming James Bond film, Quantum of Solace, in Moscow, Monday, 13 October 2008. (AP Photo/Sergey Ponomarev)

Figures in US dollars. Source: box-office mondial, www.boxofficemojo.com

Source for quotations: Le Temps, 8.11.2008. Le Matin, May 2008.