

SCREEN DAILY

The Dark Half

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Shooting has just finished in Bristol on Alastair Siddons' *The Dark Half*, the first project to come out of South West Screen's microbudget iFeatures scheme.

Synopsis: A ghost story about a 15-year-old girl and her relationship with her 40-year-old next door neighbour.

Director: Alastair Siddons

Writer: Lucy Catherine

Producer: Margeret Matheson

Cast: Jessica Barden, Tony Curran, Lyndsey Marshall

Budget: \$464,000 (£300,000)

Financing: South West Screen through micro budget scheme IFeatures, BBC Films, Matador Pictures, Film Agency of Wales, Bristol City Council

Country of production: UK

Filming locations: Bristol – on location and at the city’s new production facility, The Bottle Yard Studio.

Status: Post production

Release date: Spring 2011

Next up: The next two films to be produced through the IFeatures scheme will be *Eight Minutes Idle* and *Flying Blind* in 2011. All three films will premiere in Bristol.

Currently in post production, *The Dark Half* is the first project to come out of South West Screen’s micro budget film-making scheme iFeatures, which will see three films being produced on a budget of \$464,000 (£300,000) in the city of Bristol.

Chosen from over 500 submissions for the scheme, *The Dark Half* is a Bristol-set ghost story/horror about a teenage girl and her haunting relationship with her next door neighbour, written by Bristol Old Vic writer in residence Lucy Catherine and directed by London film-maker Alastair Siddons, who share the same agent and teamed up on his recommendation. Producer Margeret Matheson then came on board to complete the film-making team after reading the “extremely well written script, and because it’s a genre I have never done before.”

“It’s a brilliant script, so we had a really good starting point,” says first time feature director Siddons, who comes from a documentary film-making background. “It’s not a slasher horror film, it’s more of an emotional film and we looked at a lot of European horror films for inspiration,” he adds.

Headed up by Chris Moll at regional agency South West Screen to promote Bristol as a filming location, the microbudget scheme has been boosted by the recent addition to the city of The Bottle Yard Studio, which opened for business in November and is hoping to attract some big US productions in 2011.

“We were able to use the space for police interview rooms, the exterior for a school, as well as basing our production office out of it. It’s certainly made working on a low budget achievable,” says Siddons.

Matheson was equally impressed by the facility and Bristol as a filming location. “It was an absolutely brilliant resource for us. By coincidence the film is set in an area called Hartcliffe and the studio is a matter of 100 yards away. So we couldn’t have had a more satisfactory base, which also allowed us to build sets.”

“It might not have equipment companies or labs or sound stages yet, but for a lower budget British independent film, this is just the best thing you could ever find,” she adds.

As with Film London’s microbudget scheme Microwave, IFeatures is backed by BBC Films. The scheme also managed to attract funding from Matador Pictures and the Film Agency for Wales. So what’s in it for the investors?

“They liked the projects, and because it’s a production slate, it’s mitigating their risk. They recoup across all three at the end. Plus we spent a lot of time on the development side,” says Moll, who admits that having investment money from Matador has “made people sit up and take notice in the commercial potential of the projects.”

Matheson is a big fan of the IFeatures scheme: “I think it is an extremely positive thing. I think you can’t have too many new talent schemes. The fact that they attracted so many applications is evidence of demand.”

With shooting now behind them, how did the team fare on its £300,000 budget? “Well, I’ve made films for less,” says Matheson. “And when you are working on this kind of film, where people have made a sacrifice, you get an ethos where everybody wants to do the best they can for the project.”

“The script was extremely ambitious for the film’s budget, but we just went for it and we pulled it off. Everyone got paid the same, we got a really good deal with the art department who delivered an exceptional amount for a small amount of money, oh and we stayed in the worst B&Bs in town” says Siddons with a laugh.

<http://www.screendaily.com/reports/features/the-dark-half/5021846.article>