

SCREENDAILY

Killing Bono

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Recently wrapped in Belfast, *Killing Bono* is the story of two brothers whose rival school band goes on to become U2

"Everyone from Ireland has a U2 story," says Mark Huffam, one of the producers of *Killing Bono*, which has just wrapped in Belfast after a six week shoot.

Huffam's story is that he filmed at The Edge's pub whilst working as a location manager over a decade ago.

But it is the real life story of Neil McCormick (played by Ben Barnes) and his brother Ivan (Robert Sheehan), who had to face up to the fact that their rival school band went on to become U2, that has inspired *Killing Bono*.

The film is written and directed by *Martha Meet Daniel, Frank And Lawrence* director Nick Hamm, who bought the rights to McCormick's book back in 2004 and "saw the potential, because it is a great story of failure counterpointed against success."

Channel 4 had paid for the first draft, but it was at this point that Ian Flocks who spent 20 years working in the music industry as U2's agent before deciding he would rather like to make films, came on board as a producer.

"I didn't know Nick, but we had a mutual friend who told me that he had optioned the book and suggested that I take a look at it. My first reaction was, I've heard that before, but it actually turned out to be really good."

Meanwhile, Hamm's agent had sent the script to UK sales outfit Salt, where production and acquisitions director Piers Tempest was so impressed he decided to come on board as a producer.

"It had all the things I look for in a film," says Tempest. "Real commercial potential, but also the emotional depth of

the characters which will hopefully resonate with people. And it's really funny as well," he adds.

Tempest brought Belfast based Huffam in as a third producer, who suggested shooting in Belfast. "Dublin [where the film is set] is an expensive city and we were on a competitive budget, so Belfast worked for us, especially as Northern Ireland Screen were prepared to help out" says Belfast bred Huffam, who recently wrapped fantasy film *Your Highness* with Natalie Portman in the city. "It's not a big city so it's easy to get around. It's very film friendly," he adds.

According to Tempest, finding financing for the \$4.5m (£3m) project turned out to be easier than usual because "when we were pitching it, people got it straight away and could see that there would be an audience."

UK based Matador Pictures put up around a third of the budget through its EIS structured financing arm. "We thought it would be a real crowd-pleaser, and having now seen footage, we think we were right," says Matador CEO Nigel Thomas.

The rest of the budget came from Northern Ireland Screen (£450,000), Flook's company Isotope, camera equipment provider Arri Media and Molinare who are currently doing the film's post production. Sony Music UK also invested in the project after seeing the potential for the release of a soundtrack.

As well as two tracks by U2 which have never been used in a film before, the soundtrack will feature original music written by singer songwriter Joe Echo, produced by former U2 collaborator Mike Hedges, and sung by cast members Barnes, Sheehan and Martin McCann who had the unenviable task of trying to imitate one of the most famous rock stars of all time. "At times he sounded more like Bono than Bono," says Flooks, who admitted that the film-making process made him "nostalgic for when I worked with them.". The film also stars Peter Postelthwaite and US actress Krysten Ritter as Neil's love interest.

New UK based film financing company Silver Reel gap financed the project. Ian Hutchinson, who heads up the fund, said he was attracted to "the script and the diverse expertise of the producers" as well as the fact that "the film is being made for a realistic budget, underpinned by the global brand of U2".

Salt also secured pre-sales on the film at Cannes last year to Svensk (Scandinavia), Pyramide (France), Odeon (Greece), Lusomundo (Portugal), Prime Pictures (Middle East) and Jaguar for airline distribution. A UK distribution deal, says Tempest, is "imminent". Meanwhile, the film is expected to premiere at Toronto, where Salt will try to woo a US distributor.

Whilst the film is set in the 1970's and early 80's, Tempest is confident that it will resonate with audiences today. "You look at the popularity of X Factor and Pop Idol, it is such a current thing. This film is a great cautionary tale about fame, but it has also got the redemptive quality, Neil is not cut out to be a rock star but he finds out what he is good at which is writing." Still, with a cameo appearance from McCormick, it looks like he may finally have got his fifteen minutes of fame, even if he didn't get to be in U2.

As for a cameo from Bono himself, all Flooks will say is that U2 has been "very supportive" of the project. It looks like we'll have to see the film to find out.



