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Blighty's F&ME confirms seven-pic slate by year's end

Pix among last qualifiers for Section 42 and Section 48 tax relief

By MELANIE GOODFELLOW

LONDON -- U.K. production company Film & Music Entertainment (F&ME) announced Wednesday that it expects to complete a seven-pic slate with a total budget of \$32 million by the end of the year.

"It has been a very full and fulfilling year for the company," said managing director Mike Downey.

The highest-profile production is Slovak helmer Juraj Jakubisko's "Bathory," an English-language period tale about a 17th-century murderess; it stars Anna Friel, Vincent Regan and Hans Matheson.

The \$12 million film was shot in various locations across central Europe. An extended promo will screen at the American Film Market in November.

The only completed pic is Miguel Alcantud's English-language Derek Jacobi starrer "Anastezsi," set against the backdrop of a mysterious music academy in southern Italy.

Other films include Finnish Raimo O. Niemi's Lapland-set family pic "Mystery of the Wolf," Finnish Pekka Lehtosaari's E5 million (\$6.3 million) feature-length animation "Quest of a Heart" and Gunnar B. Gudmundsson's "Damsels and Dorks" (previously "Astropia"), which are in post-production.

Another two films, Guillermo Groizard's drama "Dos" and an untitled human-trafficking drama by Slovenian helmer Damjan Kozole, are still in production.

Most of the productions, other than "Damsels and Dorks," have been produced under the U.K.'s old Section 48 and Section 42 tax break regimes. To qualify they had to start production by the end of March.

Downey said the U.K.'s new tax regime, which started April 1, signaled a change in direction for F&ME. He said the new film tax legislation had made it much more difficult to partner with European companies.

"The law is skewed in favor of big U.S. productions coming to the U.K. But we saw this coming 18 months ago and have cut our cloth accordingly. We have a vigorous and commercial set of films for 2007 and much bigger-budget

pictures planned for 2008," he said.

F&ME productions skedded for 2007 include "White Lightnin' "; Michael Kalesniko's "Fake," docudrama "The Turtle Song."



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