

SCREEN DIRECTORS GUILD OF IRELAND

PHOTO: Mark Doherty and Dylan Moran on the set of *A Film With Me In It* (left to right).



SDGI Director in Focus

Director IAN FITZGIBBON tell us about making *A Film with Me in It*.

USUALLY THE THING that draws me to a script is character. Maybe it's because I started off as an actor, but my way into a story is the characters. In the case of *A Film with Me in It*, it was the two main guys. I immediately warmed to them, two first-class losers with delusions of talent.

I came across the script almost by accident. I had cast Mark Doherty in a minor role in a BBC comedy pilot. We were chatting between set-ups and I discovered that he had a script that had been languishing in a drawer for a couple of years. I read it on the train to Belfast. It made me laugh. It was outrageous and strange, but it was also funny. Like *Withnail & I* meets *Shallow Grave*.

I took the script to Alan Moloney. I have a good relationship with Alan. We've done a fair bit of TV together and he's an incredibly dynamic producer. He knows how it works and how to make things happen.

'Dylan Moran has to play Pierce.'

That's all I said to him. He read the script and loved it. That was June; by October we were in prep and part of the joy of it for me was not being stuck in development. No other parties were involved. The Irish Film Board and Parallel Films, that was it, so I was able to make the film I wanted to make. Sure, there were budget restrictions: no dolly, no tracks, limited locations, etc. The main location was the interior of the basement flat and we shot in there for three weeks. But limitations can also force you to be creative. Alan was very hands-on and I consulted him on all the key decisions. He has very strong opinions, but then

again, so do I. We don't always agree but his contribution was invaluable.

Hue & I

In terms of the look, I had specific references. *Withnail & I* was key in terms of the basement flat and what the guys were wearing. We were very careful about restricting the colours. We went for a coolish hue, with lots of dour, earthy, autumnal colours. In the grade, we pushed the contrast and

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there's a slight desaturation there too.

For me the key word was deadpan. It was writ large on my office wall. I rehearsed a fair bit with Mark and Dylan. A lot of directors don't like rehearsing, they like to keep it loose and let the actors arrive fresh. Not me. For me, preparation is key. I like to have a definite plan, even if it means throwing it away. But I kept coming back to the tone of the piece being deadpan, that was very important. Mark's acting tends towards that anyway, he's a minimalist. With Dylan it took a

bit of getting used to. He's such a fine comic performer; he knows what's going to get a laugh. So I sat on him a little bit. I encouraged him to be more internal with his acting, more emotionally truthful. The more outrageous the story becomes, the more serious I wanted the performances to be.

There's also a fair amount of improvisation in there, especially with Dylan. He has such a gift for that, so I allowed space for it and it added richness to the script. Keith Allen was very impressive too. He has such a serious approach to his work; he really made the landlord come to life. He has presence.

Wonky logic

Mark, however, was in a difficult position. It was his script and he was playing the lead. He quickly realised that film has its own demands: when you're on set unexpected things happen. Actors find they're not comfortable with a piece of dialogue, or logistical production problems arise that mean that you're constantly revising or altering the script. During the shoot I'd rehearse with Mark and Dylan at the weekends. We'd look at key scenes and try them various ways, making quite a lot of cuts and simplifying things. Farce is quite technical. The story has a wonky logic to it and we knew we had to respect that.

Tony Cranstoun was the editor. His work includes *The League of Gentlemen*, *The Royle Family* and *Early Doors* and I think we really benefited from his comedy background. His style is laidback but he is very thorough and extremely patient. Like all good editors, he presents you with things you don't expect.

Personally, I find editing fascinating. There are so many possibilities. I tend to be too hasty and to want to cut everything. Alan and I had different views on what the cut should be; I think he felt I was being too drastic, especially with the first third. We argued it back and forth until we got a cut we were both pretty happy with. It took us a while, but we got there.

The hardest part was wrapping without an ending to the film. We needed a star for that, so although we pretty much had our cut by the end of November, we had no ending. A film without an end to it. Jonathan Rhys Myers was only available in January, so we parked everything before Christmas and came back in mid-January. We shot the final scene (and a couple of pick-up scenes) and then: that was that.

A Film with Me in It had its world premiere at The Edinburgh Film Festival at the end of June.