

Luxembourg thriller raises questions about Danish silent movie star



Who Killed Asta Nielsen director Oliver Koos (left) with producera and Equinox CEO Nick Rollinger at the Equinox studios. *Photo: JB*

A short film by a Luxembourg production company is creating a buzz despite the fact that not a single scene has been shot yet.

The curiously titled *Who killed Asta Nielsen?* is the film debut of Equinox Productions, to be shot in English in the autumn with possibly an international star tipped for the female lead.

But, what is attracting the fans and numerous comments on Facebook is not the cast but the mystery surrounding the title.

The real Asta Nielsen was a Danish star of the silent movie era, who lived a long and fruitful life until she passed away in 1972. In reality she was never killed. So, does the film shed new light on her life?

Producer and Equinox CEO Nick Rollinger remains tight-lipped on the details of the thriller but it is clear to see he is excited to working on a film involving such a famous historical personality.

Nielsen the "femme fatale"

"She was a femme fatale as well as a very interesting and ambiguous actress and woman," he says, adding: "One thing that was interesting was she had an aura about her. After seeing her movies and many pictures for me she wasn't a beautiful woman. She wasn't the kind of woman you say 'wow!'. But you don't have to be beautiful to have an aura."

While the title carries Nielsen's name, the film is not just about her, explains director Oliver Koos. The 15-minute story, he says, follows the plight of British banker Henry, during a visit to a wealthy French seaside resort in 1929 where his gravely ill son is being treated by one of Europe's most renowned doctors. Neglected by his wife, Henry meets Asta Nielsen and the two begin an affair which threatens to destroy his family.



Silent movie star Asta Nielsen *Photo: Equinox Productions*

A 'who-dunnit'

“It leaves the story open-ended as to who killed Asta Nielsen. In a way it's kind of a 'who-dunnit',” concludes Koos, refusing to give any further details.

The idea for the film came from esteemed Luxembourg director and friend of Rollinger, Andy Bausch. Rollinger, also an expert of movies from the silent film era, immediately saw the “thriller potential” and set out to sharpen the script with the help of Koos and script doctor Christian Thiry. “I liked the script because it was a thriller which will be played in the 1920s. It's a period film, from an era which I like very much and will be a new challenge for a lot of us,” he said.

Building a team

That was a year ago and now, with funding from the Luxembourg Film Fund, Rollinger and Koos are working on casting and compiling a reliable crew. “We're very careful to choose the people we want to work with. We think it works better where the set feels like a family. Nick and I really stress the team work part,” said Koos.

Filming will be done in both Luxembourg and Cabourg, in France, and local casting is expected to take place in the coming weeks.

New step for Equinox

The project marks a watershed moment for Equinox Productions, which was first created in 2004 to protect the rights of musicians. Equinox became a recording and movie post-production studio and in 2009, following Rollinger's retirement from a career as bank general manager, the firm shifted its focus to film production working in partnership on a post-production level.

“This is our first film. In the past we've done partnerships but this will be the first film completely produced by us. It's an interesting challenge for Equinox. It's all our work. When we've grown the team I have no doubt that we will make a great movie together and that more projects will follow,” said Rollinger.