

Cindy Cowan Interview: Executive Producer Brings 'Red Lights' to Sundance

CREATED ON 09 JANUARY 2012 WRITTEN BY C.J. PERRY



It has been noted before that producing indie films—and then securing **distribution** for a movie and guiding it so it is seen before an appreciative audience—takes a special kind of dedication. And now, amidst razor thin margins and a film market that is in a state of flux, it takes a producer who understands the process from top to bottom: how to secure foreign market sales, **film incentives** to help offset a budget, and *what* is even considered an indie film these days.

That is where Cindy Cowan comes in. Cowan is the executive producer on the recently completed "Red Lights," which will have its premiere at the upcoming **Sundance Film Festival**. Written and directed by Rodrigo Cortés (best known for "Buried," starring **Ryan Reynolds**), the film centers on a psychologist and her assistant whose work with paranormal activity leads them to investigate a

0

well-known psychic. "Red Lights" boasts a cast headlined by Robert De Niro, Sigourney Weaver, Cillian Murphy, Toby Jones, and Elizabeth Olsen, who impressed Sundance audiences in 2011 with her performance in "**Martha Marcy May Marlene**."

Digg ↑

Cowan has an extensive track record as a producer and executive producer. Films on her resume include "Very Bad Things," "Dr. T and the Women," and "Scorched." She co-founded and was president of Initial Entertainment Group (IEG), and now

f Share

heads Cindy Cowan Entertainment. Cowan came to film and television production almost by accident; after graduating college with a degree in psychology, it was during her "infamous year off" where she took a job with a CBS affiliate in Miami, Florida, that started her in the industry. She moved to L.A. and found success initially as a songwriter before working her way up the production ladder.

Cowan took some time to discuss "Red Lights" with Film Slate Magazine as she and her production team prepare the film for its premiere at Sundance.

Film Slate Magazine: So how did 'Red Lights' come about? Was it something that you had for a while or was it something that Rodrigo came to you with?

Cindy Cowan: UTA (United Talent Agency) actually sent the project over to me to read the script and I had just seen 'Buried' and kind of became just a little bit obsessed with what Rodrigo pulled off in that film and really wanted to work with him. So it was great and Rodrigo was coming in to town about a month later and we met and decided that that would be the next film that I would finance.

FSM: When you set a project like this up, do you see it all as one process, or do you kind of segment things out as the executive producer? How does that process work, especially with an indie film?



CC: With an indie film, I always look to see where I can get my returns, as far as my equity is concerned. The first thing that I usually do is figure out where we're shooting at. Nowadays, especially with independent productions, you have to take into account soft monies—it's such a big factor in what we do nowadays. And so, this particular film was great because we could shoot in Barcelona. There was X amount of money that we could get out of that, won't have to be paid back to Spain, and then we could start piece-mealing the rest of the financing together with some pre-sales, etc., so I could figure out what the equity would actually be.

FSM: And if you're filming in the U.S., or even overseas, when you're looking for grants or film incentives, how important is that to a filmmaker now?

CC: Yeah, it's very important now. It's very rare that we would get into a film where we didn't have some kind of soft monies attached to it. It's just that it's unfortunate; the market is a lot different than it used to be 10 years ago. It's just become a very important factor.

FSM: Speaking of 'Red Lights,' in the casting department, were there roles that you wanted specific people? How did that go, with Robert De Niro, Sigourney Weaver, Lizzie Olsen even, who has gotten a lot of buzz from 'Martha Marcy May Marlene.'



CC: We got really lucky with the cast of 'Red Lights.' The casting process became very easy. The greatest find which we had, which I have to attribute to our