**Is German TV Ready to Go Global?**

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'Ku Damm 56 - Rebel With A Cause' from ZDF Enterprises, was one of hottest new dramas screening at MIPTV.

Courtesy of ZDF Enterprises

Pushed by Amazon and Netflix (who are both doing German TV series) and a growing creative confidence, German drama is poised to take the world stage.

Germany is Europe's biggest television market and its largest producer of TV series, but those shows rarely get seen outside the country. Or, at least, they rarely did.

*Deutschland '83*, a smart spy drama set at the height of the Cold War, and *Generation War,* a brutal account of WWII purged of both sentiment and cliché, broke the mold for German series. Both were critically acclaimed and sold widely abroad — *Deutschland '83* premiered on Sundance TV, the first German series to air on a U.S. network, while *Generation War* went out on Netflix stateside.

Their success, and growing pressures within the German market to produce drama series to compete with the best coming out of the U.S. and Europe, is driven a production revolution in German TV. Never have there been so many ambitious series getting commissioned from German networks. And never have international buyers, who crowded into Cannes this week for the MIPTV market, been so eager to see them.

MIPTV put the focus on German programming for this year's market, highlighting some of the hottest new shows from the country, including *Ku’damm 56 — Rebel With a Cause*, a female-focused period drama set in Berlin at the start of Germany's post-WWII economic boom; and the bleak *NSU German History X*, a *American Crime Story*-like dramatization of the neo-Nazi terror cell that killed at least 10 people between 2000-2007.

Speaking at MIPTV, Benjamin Benedict, CEO of UFA Fiction, the Berlin-based production house that produced *Ku'damm*, *Generation War* and *Deutschland '83*, said new German drama is a radical break from the past, with younger, sexy protagonists; smarter, more complex characters; and a slicker production style adapted from U.S. shows.

“The Germans are able to sit beautifully in the middle [between local and American content],” added Guido Pugnetti, the head of marketing and TV product management at Italy's RAI Cinema, noting how successful recent German shows have been on Italian TV. “They’re taking the best from the U.S. way — rhythm, pace, storytelling, subjects — and at the same time giving it a European flavor.”

It's helped as well that the global TV market has become more diverse. The explosion of niche, digital and online networks has meant more room for foreign-language series, such as Channel 4's Walter Presents, an online streaming service from the British network, which screens only non-English-language series. *Deutschland '83* had its U.K. premiere on Channel 4 before streaming as a box set on Walter Presents.

“Many countries were very reluctant [in the past to] take German programs because of the language,” said Susanne Muller, executive director of feature films at German public broadcaster ZDF. “Now in this fragmented market, our German product is broadcast in the U.K. on BBC Four with subtitles. This was not possible many years ago. We have a new way of bringing things to the market.”

Another market pressure driving the German TV renaissance is Netflix. The SVOD giant has moved aggressively into Germany, commissioning its first series, *Dark*, from the production company behind German foreign-language Oscar winner *The Lives of Others*. Amazon is also betting on German TV, ordering up the drama *Wanted* from Matthias Schweighofer, one of the country's biggest film stars.

“Netflix and Amazon don't have a huge subscriber base yet in Germany, but they're having a big impact on the industry because everyone is moving in reaction to them,” says Jorg Winger, a producer and co-writer on *Deutschland '83*. “The networks are ordering the edgy stuff because they're worried they'll get left behind.”

That pressure explains ZDF, an often stodgy German public broadcaster, commissioning *Morgen hör ich auf* (*I'll Stop Tomorrow*), a *Breaking Bad*-style drama about a family man who takes to counterfeiting to pay down his mounting debts. Or *Weinberg*, a *Twin Peaks*-esque surreal mystery, set in German wine country, which ran on German pay-TV network TNT last fall. Or*Babylon Berlin*, a $45 million crime drama set in 1920s Berlin, which public broadcaster ARD and pay-TV network Sky Deutschland are co-financing and *Cloud Atlas* director Tom Tykwer is showrunning, together with directors Hendrik Handloegten and Achim von Borries. *Babylon Berlin*, which is set to begin shooting later this year, is certain to be a hot title at MIPTV 2017.

“We've been knocking at the door for sometime now, but a lot of the big broadcasters, particularly in the U.S., didn't taking us seriously,” says Jan Mojto, head of Beta Film, which is backing and handling international sales on shows such as *Babylon Berlin* and *NSU*. “That's changed. Now, at least, we have a seat at the table. We have to see what we do with it.”