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BIG SCREEN BRUM

Top American film director Travis Pike is in Birmingham to select possible locations for a £10 million movie that would feature more than 3,000 people. GRAHAM YOUNG reports on the city's bid to be the Hollywood of Europe

One of the world's leading actresses is being lined up to star in the multi-million pound epic that could place Birmingham on the world's movie map.

Los Angeles producer Travis Edward Pike is naming no names but he says he has a VERY big name pencilled in to play the Goddess of Love in his fantasy film.

What's more, he's fallen in love himself with the West Midlands.

Pike wants to film *Morningstone* in and around Birmingham, using Coventry and Stratford as a make-believe version of the Bermuda Triangle.

And as he tours the city, he is amazed at what he sees.

"This area has got to be the best kept secret in Europe" he says.

"It's perfect for what I need for the film -- and when I've finished, it won't be a secret any more!"

"You always think of Birmingham being smoky and not having any countryside. To say you're coming here is like saying you have a Tasmanian sister with two heads!"

But after seeing what you've done here, it must be one of the most impressive cities in Europe."

When he wrote the first screenplay and music for *Morningstone* towards the end of the 1980s, Travis thought about Britain as a location.

And more recently soaring US costs have strengthened his resolve to bring his film crew and cast across the Atlantic.

Birmingham began to figure high on his list after he met Dorothy Hobson, director of the city's Media Development Agency, at this year's Santa Monica film festival.

Pike studied exclusive *Evening Mail* photographs of a fire at Moseley Baptist Church for the Channel Four

drama *The Big Battalions* -- and immediately booked his air ticket.

"The natural look of the West Midlands is exactly what I want," he says.

"Because you are quite far north here, it will be dark a lot of the time in October -- and much of the film will be shot at night or when the sun is going down or coming up."

In just three days, Pike has seen most of the locations he needs for his film, apart from three that he hopes the public can help supply.

All I need now is a sacred-looking pool, an isolated cottage, and a clearing on a hillside facing east that doesn't include urban views or pylons," he says.

If Pike does commit himself, the film will guarantee work for 170 crew and local technicians -- and a 50 strong US crew will book three month's hotel accommodation.

The film is about an American rock star named Morgan Newbegin who discovers a fantasy world in Britain.

Pop concert scenes alone would require more than 3,000 extras -- and British actresses would play a nine-strong backing group.

"The male lead would have to be an American so it won't be a foreign film to our home audience," he says. "I already have three top actresses lined up."

His director of photography will be Peter Anderson, who's worked on *Roger Rabbit*, *The Hunt for Red October*, *the Deer Hunter* and *Close Encounters*.

Sound supervisor will be George Johnsen who was involved with *Star Trek -- the Movie* and Steven Spielberg's TV series *Amazing Stories*.

Travis wants to film this October -- his 50-year-old brother is dying and he wants him to see the finished movie, but he is willing to wait until next spring if necessary.

During his visit to Britain, he will also visit sites in north Wales, Liverpool and Sheffield -- but believes he will end up back in Birmingham.

A small number of films have been made in Birmingham, before, but not on the sort of scale that Travis envisions.

Cliff Richards starred in *Take Me High* and parts of John Cleese's *Clockwise* were shot in the city, and Warren Mitchell appeared in *Knights and Emeralds* in the late 1980s.

The hard-hitting *Prostitute* was made here and, of course, there have been TV series such as *Gangsters*, *Crossroads*, *Boon* and *Specials*.

MEDIA POST

Lights, camera, hopes

Movie Mogul: Mr Travis Pike discusses locations with MDA Director Mrs Dorothy Hobson

Hollywood looks to Midlands for £10m fantasy.

An American film producer jetted into Birmingham yesterday to discuss the possibility of shooting a feature film.

Mr Travis Pike is on a five day recce for locations in Birmingham, Worcestershire and Warwickshire for the £10 million Hollywood film *Morningstone*. The film could also put the National Indoor Arena, the International Convention Centre

and the National Exhibition Centre Arena on the map.

Mr Pike, from Los Angeles-based Otherworld Productions, is here after meeting Media Development Agency director Mrs Dorothy Hobson at the Locations-Expo in Santa Monica earlier this year.

Mr Pike said: "It's the story of a rock star who's doing a concert somewhere, and it might as well be the NEC. After that, he goes back to an industrial soiree at a big house.

"He drives away and goes into the Celtic underworld. The fairies convince him to change his ways and all of ours. In that sense Birmingham and the Black Country

are nice because they symbolize all the pressures of the Industrial Revolution.

Oh, and the fairies talk in iambic pentameter -- which he said makes filming in the land of Shakespeare's birth doubly appropriate. The MDA hopes Midland film crews can be utilised.

Otherworld's director of photography, Peter Anderson, worked on *The Hunt for Red October* and *Look Who's Talking*, while sound director George Johnsen, worked on several of the *Star Trek* movies. Production designer George Costello's credits include *Terminator* and *Problem Child*.

NB: Originally, there were photos in this and the previous article, but being newsprint, they did not replicate well, so both are transcribed.