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ZDF Studios, Factual Fiction Partner to Update 'Dorian Gray' to a Social Media Age (EXCLUSIVE)

By John Hopewell

Courtesty of ZDF Studios

German powerhouse ZDF Studios and U.K.-based Factual Fiction are reteaming for "#DorianGray," an updated social media spin on Oscar Wilde's classic, "The Picture of Dorian Gray."

In Wilde's original, first published as a novella in 1890 in Lippincott's Monthly Magazine, the self-besotted Dorian Gray sells his soul in exchange for eternal youth, a picture painted of him recording the decay of his soul as in outward appearance he remains physically forever young.

Currently being written by Maiya John, a young London-based screenwriter, the contemporary reimagining is described by ZDF Studios as "a suspenseful ride through the life of a teenager as they construct their identity."

While navigating sex, and gender, mental health and consent, through tweets and #instagram and Tik Tok videos, Dorian Gray, as in Wilde's central concept, projects an image of who he'd like to be, rather than who he really is.

"After co-developing the delightful mystery series 'The Puzzle Lady,' it's an absolute pleasure to be partnering with Factual Fiction again," said Yi Qiao, director, drama, for ZDF Studios.

"Taking the theme of this classic book and giving it a modern twist is ingenious and – especially in the age of social media – more current than ever before. I cannot wait to bring this version of Dorian Gray to life," she added.

"If ever there was a novel written for our time it is 'The Picture of Dorian Gray.' Morally agnostic, self-obsessed, terrified of rejection and yet deeply compelling," said Tom Dalton, co-founder of Factual Fiction. "Exploring this world with brilliant young writer Maiya John, alongside the fantastic creative support of Yi Qiao and ZDF Studios is an immense pleasure." John is a freelance screenwriter who describes herself as a "spoken word poet." She was shortlisted for BBC Words First in 2021 for her poem "Dear Insecure Black Man."

"#DorianGray" adds to a burgeoning list of English-language titles which ZDF Studios, launched in 1993 as ZDF Enterprises , has boarded in recent years either as a co-production partner or international distributor.

These take in "Clean Sweep," with "Peaky Blinders" star Charlene McKenna; Magellan-Elcano epic adventure series "Boundless," directed by Simon West ("Con Air," "Lara Croft: Tomb Raider" and starring Rodrigo Santoro and Alvaro Morte and of course Berlinale Series opener "The Swarm," executive produced by "Game of Thrones" Frank Doelger.

ZDF Studios is also re-teaming with Paris-based Cottonwood Media, the Paris National Opera, U.S. streamer Hulu, ZDF itself and France Televisions, all partners on "Find Me in Paris," which has run to three seasons, for another premium live action tween series, "Spellbound."

Series Mania Forum announced last week that one of its 15 projects at its Pitching Sessions will be "The Bronte Girls," capturing the sisters on the final summer they spent together as teens in 1835.

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"I'm so excited to share this wild imagining of the Brontes that uses historical context to explore modern issues and fiction to create an epic adventure that is deeply relatable and relevant," series creator Caroline Kelly Franklin told *Variety*.